THE BLACK CAT

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UNUSUAL SHORT STORIES

Olivette Bourgeois

JAN 22 1917

The Black Cat

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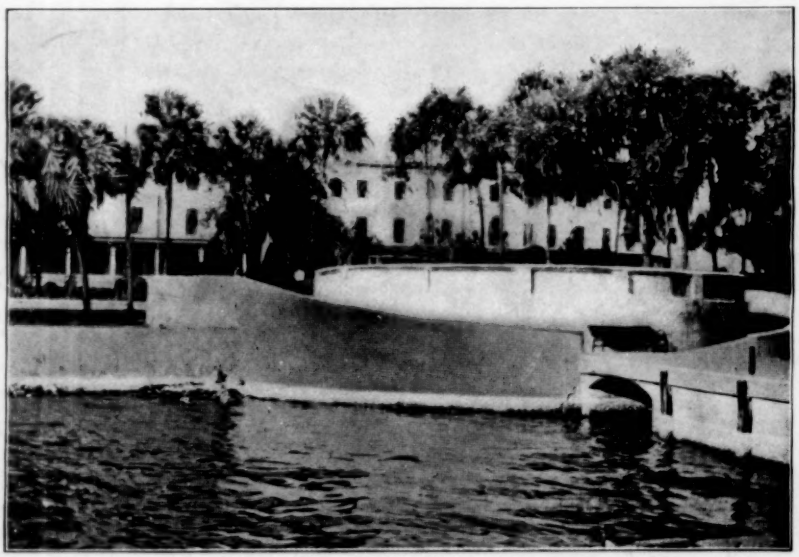

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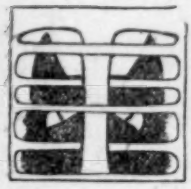
Resolved: That a long barreled revolver is superior to a short barreled revolver in accuracy, moral effect, and other respects. That is the resolution which the captain and first mate of the S. S. Leviathan debate upon, the former taking the affirmative. It is the corner stone of a good story.



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"And after all, Sven," growled Captain Webster through his whiskers, "you have to say that the long barrel gives you more accuracy. It must. And then—the moral effect! You baboon! A fine lot of bums we'd look, roaming the high seas with nothing better than your sawn-off peashooters! It's hard times when mariner-men have to pack guns for the sake of their wives and children; but they have to; and by gar! they shall have good guns while they're at it. There shan't be a gun-barrel less than nine inches long on this ship, Sven Kill—not a one. You can use that there plaything of yours for a paper-weight."

The big Swede eyed with disfavor the huge Colt with which the captain tapped the table in emphasis of his remark.

"Dey are so ugly," he said; "so handless; and dey so bulge de pocket—"

"You ain't goin' to take tea with the Queen of Sweden with yer gun on," said the captain sarcastically.

"I don't move it quick enough, again," protested Sven; "somehow it strains me at the wrist. I don't blow off his head at a moment. I don't like."

"You just show a man one of these things," said the captain, tapping the demi-cannon persuasively on the table, "and you don't have to blow off his head—not unless so be as he's contumelious, as the good book says. He caves in. It scares him. But that teaspoon of yours—he'd try pitching pennies into it. He'd inquire if you could be hired for the Fourth. No, sir. My crew shall shed as little of the gallows-warrant as possible; they shall carry big guns. You can keep that thing of yours for use in private life, if you wanta; but you don't use it in my business. I need dividends."

The mate filled a glass of kummel. He was a man of few words. The captain was not. Since Sven had said all he could, and since he knew that the captain was only just getting in form for the reaching of arguments from the earth and sky and the waters under the earth, he gave in—ungraciously.

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"They won't arrest a family man," he told himself dreamily, "with whiskers and a face like mine, for carrying a gun in this part of the city. It they do, I can say, 'Cap'n Webster; fifty-seven; white; S. S. Leviathan; married; not murderous.' That'll do it."

He turned to watch the arch of Brooklyn Bridge, with its crawling lights and their counterparts in the water beneath. Few tugs were around; the water looked untroubled. The commerce of the river had been overtaken by the calm which very rarely falls upon it, even so late at night as this—the midnight hour. The captain decided to take a stroll over the bridge. Perhaps he would return by the ferry.

Captain C. V. B. Webster was of the type of mariner not given to deep reflection on any matters not brought by circumstance immediately under his slightly red-rugged nose. He had a certain beautiful practicality which the addition of alcohol in its more concentrated solutions served only to render more evident. It was part of his philosophy to consider seriously the exact section of any circumstances in which he might find himself. As he neared the New York end of the bridge he was glowering into his whiskers over the problem of the increased cost of living—the particular application of the problem which applied to him. The fact was, the "Leviathan" had to make more money, and that quickly.

Mr. Webster and his mate of the ominous name had decided on a more lucrative method then the humdrum business of transporting goods from one point to another; that section of the problem was forgotten. What worried him now was the thought that in order to embark on her new career, she would need equipment of a peculiar nature; mainly accoutrements for the crew, and an artillery-adornment for a certain secluded portion of the deck; all of which would cost money.

The treasury of the "Leviathan," that commonwealth among ships, was in a decidedly depleted condition, boasting exactly three dollars and fifteen cents. So that the aspect of the higher-cost-of-living problem, which occupied the captain, resolved into the blank question, "Where am I going to get some money?" In order to give this the clear-headed consideration which it deserved, Captain Webster had taken this walk. Whether the July air was not sufficiently bracing, or that the kummel had been a little stronger even than usual, his head did not clear so easily as he expected. He turned a dark and clammy corner into East Third Street, remarking to himself that he was "woozy."

Save for a mild fight that was proceeding a block away, and the common noises of sirens and the tackle-blocks of cranes, early morning saw perfect quiet in East Third Street. The windows of the tenement houses which towered up into the ten-mile deep blue sky, were dark. Their darkness brought a feeling of pleasant isolation to Captain Webster. Here was the place for a pipe and a little quiet consideration; besides, his head might feel clearer if he sat down a while.

The mud of the street squashed for a moment around his decided bootsoles, and he sat down, back against the wall of a cement yard on the north side of the street.

A passing policeman, catching a glimpse of the bearded face lit by the glow of the pipe-bowl, crossed the street, one hand in hip pocket, to investigate. Peculiar things, not altogether unconnected with incendiarism and bombs, are liable to happen in East Third Street.

"Y' better move off there," remarked the policeman. "Stand up, and let's have a look at y'."

Captain Webster trained two bright eyes into the glare of the flash-lamp.

"I'm harmless," he said; "and if it's all the same to you, I'd like a moment's peace. Webster;—captain of the 'Leviathan,' yonder. I'm just sitting here. It's all right."

The apparent respectability of his garb reassured the officer.

"What y' doin'?" he asked.

A gentle dignity, born of drink in moderation, possessed the captain.

"I am contemplating the heavens," he replied. "I feel a little tired."

"Y' better go home," said the officer, and passed on smiling.

Captain Webster was as dimly conscious of his going as he had been of his presence. What obsessed him was the thought of equipping a whole crew with big revolvers that would terrify, and fixing on the foredeck of the "Leviathan," (or "Bubbling Wave" or "Arethusa Jane"), a coy but effective gun of some sort. Perhaps, he decided, an honest living might be made with the aid of the revolvers alone; but three dollars and fifteen cents—

Something caught his eye.

Against the blackness of the tenement house across the street, blazed a bright square of yellow,—a lighted window with the blind down, he told himself; and from the general direction of this lighted square came a peculiar sound. It was as if a number of men were saying the same thing over and over in subdued voices. As he watched, shadows began to fall on the blind, as though a procession were passing it. The shadows of the men were so clearly defined that he could perceive that they held in their hands objects that looked like daggers. Some of them had tridents. One had an axe, which he flourished as he passed the curtain.

The thoughts of Captain Webster dropped suddenly from revolvers to earth.

"That's funny," he observed.

The procession continued, and Captain Webster watched it with a curiosity that finally bordered on indignation. He was a Mason himself; and this looked to him, in his slightly elevated condition, like some discreditable distortion of the ancient craft.

"I'll go and look into this," he murmured.

Slowly he gathered himself together, rose to his feet and crossed the road. It required a little exploring to find the door of the house. When he reached the stairs, he found they were dark, and crooked, and most unholy-smelling. There was a greasy feel on the banisters which made the captain more indignant than ever with the pageantists above. The "Leviathan" might be falling to pieces, as the marine insurance inspector had said when he last looked her over at her owner's request; but at least she was clean. Captain Webster spat eloquently on the stairs and applied an adjective to the inhabitants of the house.

He reached the fourth floor, panting, and stopped to listen for sounds of the procession; all that came to his ear was the sound of a heavy snore. Evidently the noise of the lodge in session did not carry well inside the building. Merely as a precautionary measure, he drew from his pocket the mighty Colt and made the cylinder spin clicking around.

He ascended another flight and listened.

From above he seemed to hear the faint likeness of the monotone. Over the smell of garlic and general cooking another odor, faint and penetrating, came to him.

He sniffed it with disgust.

"Incense!" he said. "Oh, gar!"

It was on the eighth floor he found them, busily intoning; and, as far as he could judge by the gentle shuffling of slippered feet behind the door, still marching slowly around. The idea annoyed him. He was tired and out of breath; and in the back of his brain had formed a definite message which he desired to deliver to the Grand Master in person, having first assured him it would take but a moment of his time. Having got this message fixed above the high-water-mark of the surging kummel,

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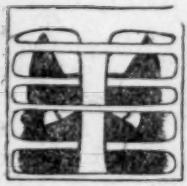

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"They won't arrest a family man," he told himself dreamily, "with whiskers and a face like mine, for carrying a gun in this part of the city. It they do, I can say, 'Cap'n Webster; fifty-seven; white; S. S. Leviathan; married; not murderous.' That'll do it."

He turned to watch the arch of Brooklyn Bridge, with its crawling lights and their counterparts in the water beneath. Few tugs were around; the water looked untroubled. The commerce of the river had been overtaken by the calm which very rarely falls upon it, even so late at night as this—the midnight hour. The captain decided to take a stroll over the bridge. Perhaps he would return by the ferry.

Captain C. V. B. Webster was of the type of mariner not given to deep reflection on any matters not brought by circumstance immediately under his slightly red-rugged nose. He had a certain beautiful practicality which the addition of alcohol in its more concentrated solutions served only to render more evident. It was part of his philosophy to consider seriously the exact section of any circumstances in which he might find himself. As he neared the New York end of the bridge he was glowering into his whiskers over the problem of the increased cost of living—the particular application of the problem which applied to him. The fact was, the "Leviathan" had to make more money, and that quickly.

Mr. Webster and his mate of the ominous name had decided on a more lucrative method then the humdrum business of transporting goods from one point to another; that section of the problem was forgotten. What worried him now was the thought that in order to embark on her new career, she would need equipment of a peculiar nature; mainly accoutrements for the crew, and an artillery-adornment for a certain secluded portion of the deck; all of which would cost money.

The treasury of the "Leviathan," that commonwealth among ships, was in a decidedly depleted condition, boasting exactly three dollars and fifteen cents. So that the aspect of the higher-cost-of-living problem, which occupied the captain, resolved into the blank question, "Where am I going to get some money?" In order to give this the clear-headed consideration which it deserved, Captain Webster had taken this walk. Whether the July air was not sufficiently bracing, or that the kummel had been a little stronger even than usual, his head did not clear so easily as he expected. He turned a dark and clammy corner into East Third Street, remarking to himself that he was "woozy."

Save for a mild fight that was proceeding a block away, and the common noises of sirens and the tackle-blocks of cranes, early morning saw perfect quiet in East Third Street. The windows of the tenement houses which towered up into the ten-mile deep blue sky, were dark. Their darkness brought a feeling of pleasant isolation to Captain Webster. Here was the place for a pipe and a little quiet consideration; besides, his head might feel clearer if he sat down a while.

The mud of the street squashed for a moment around his decided bootsoles, and he sat down, back against the wall of a cement yard on the north side of the street.

A passing policeman, catching a glimpse of the bearded face lit by the glow of the pipe-bowl, crossed the street, one hand in hip pocket, to investigate. Peculiar things, not altogether unconnected with incendiarism and bombs, are liable to happen in East Third Street.

"Y' better move off there," remarked the policeman. "Stand up, and let's have a look at y'."

Captain Webster trained two bright eyes into the glare of the flash-lamp.

"I'm harmless," he said; "and if it's all the same to you, I'd like a moment's peace. Webster;—captain of the 'Leviathan,' yonder. I'm just sitting here. It's all right."

The apparent respectability of his garb reassured the officer.

"What y' doin'?" he asked.

A gentle dignity, born of drink in moderation, possessed the captain.

"I am contemplating the heavens," he replied. "I feel a little tired."

"Y' better go home," said the officer, and passed on smiling.

Captain Webster was as dimly conscious of his going as he had been of his presence. What obsessed him was the thought of equipping a whole crew with big revolvers that would terrify, and fixing on the foredeck of the "Leviathan," (or "Bubbling Wave" or "Arethusa Jane"), a coy but effective gun of some sort. Perhaps, he decided, an honest living might be made with the aid of the revolvers alone; but three dollars and fifteen cents—

Something caught his eye.

Against the blackness of the tenement house across the street, blazed a bright square of yellow,—a lighted window with the blind down, he told himself; and from the general direction of this lighted square came a peculiar sound. It was as if a number of men were saying the same thing over and over in subdued voices. As he watched, shadows began to fall on the blind, as though a procession were passing it. The shadows of the men were so clearly defined that he could perceive that they held in their hands objects that looked like daggers. Some of them had tridents. One had an axe, which he flourished as he passed the curtain.

The thoughts of Captain Webster dropped suddenly from revolvers to earth.

"That's funny," he observed.

The procession continued, and Captain Webster watched it with a curiosity that finally bordered on indignation. He was a Mason himself; and this looked to him, in his slightly elevated condition, like some discreditable distortion of the ancient craft.

"I'll go and look into this," he murmured.

Slowly he gathered himself together, rose to his feet and crossed the road. It required a little exploring to find the door of the house. When he reached the stairs, he found they were dark, and crooked, and most unholy-smelling. There was a greasy feel on the banisters which made the captain more indignant than ever with the pageantists above. The "Leviathan" might be falling to pieces, as the marine insurance inspector had said when he last looked her over at her owner's request; but at least she was clean. Captain Webster spat eloquently on the stairs and applied an adjective to the inhabitants of the house.

He reached the fourth floor, panting, and stopped to listen for sounds of the procession; all that came to his ear was the sound of a heavy snore. Evidently the noise of the lodge in session did not carry well inside the building. Merely as a precautionary measure, he drew from his pocket the mighty Colt and made the cylinder spin clicking around.

He ascended another flight and listened.

From above he seemed to hear the faint likeness of the monotone. Over the smell of garlic and general cooking another odor, faint and penetrating, came to him.

He sniffed it with disgust.

"Incense!" he said. "Oh, gar!"

It was on the eighth floor he found them, busily intoning; and, as far as he could judge by the gentle shuffling of slippered feet behind the door, still marching slowly around. The idea annoyed him. He was tired and out of breath; and in the back of his brain had formed a definite message which he desired to deliver to the Grand Master in person, having first assured him it would take but a moment of his time. Having got this message fixed above the high-water-mark of the surging kummel,

he knocked at the door. It was designed to be a hard, firm, summoning knock, suggestive of police; but, as it reached the panel, it was merely a succession of taps. Captain Webster was annoyed. He raised his fist and smote heavily on the thin wood.

The shuffling sound had stopped at the first tap. Now, after the final bump, he heard the slither of feet approaching the door. There was a slight delay. The captain grew still more annoyed. He would deliver the message as soon as he clapped eyes on any member of this singularly disgraceful lodge.

A light flashed upon him. A square foot of the door resolved itself into an opening, through which protruded a rather grimy hand. A voice said something in a foreign tongue. It seemed to be asking a question.

Captain Webster delivered the message that hung on the tip of his tongue. It was not so clearly enunciated as he would have liked.

"You—gotohell," he said. As the hand still lingered, he hit it with his revolver-barrel. Then he awaited the chance to fight everybody concerned.

To his intense surprise, the hand was withdrawn not rapidly, but as if it had been expecting the blow and was now satisfied. In a minute it reappeared, holding out to the waiting captain a large envelope, the string fastening of which was supplemented by a dozen big red seals.

"Gar!" said the captain under his breath. He took the package. The hand was withdrawn. He could hear noises which indicated that a number of men were clustering up to the inside of the door. As he stood there, his big gun drooping in his hand, a wailing chant, like unto the concert of many cats, fell on his ear. It seemed to be reiterating some question in the weird language he had heard at first. At last it stopped. The singers seemed to await some reply.

He let them wait a moment. He would teach them to serenade him.

He repeated his former remark, more clearly, more loudly, and twice.

A pained silence fell upon the lodge. Then arose a mighty hubbub. The next instant, the door was flung wide open and a horde of men burst out. They waved gleaming steel and shrieked. They had but two yards to cover to be at the captain's throat; but the South Seas train a man to rapid action. Before one of those daggers could approach him more nearly than the doorsill, Captain Webster, revolver in hand, was four steps down from that landing, plunging recklessly downstairs. As he went, he thought to his sobered self that this was a dern nice thing to happen to a peaceful man.

As he turned cyclonically into the landing where he had heard the heavy snore, something bright clattered from above to the boards at his feet.

"Throwing knives," he muttered; and classified his pursuers, "Wops."

They were after him hard. The rushing feet of the mob, and their remarkably husky yells, were very close behind when he took the last flight of steps at one leap and stumbled into the street. He was up in an instant; and the first of his pursuers saw him disappearing around a corner of the cement-yard building. The chase followed, with a roar; but when it reached the corner, Captain C. V. B. Webster was not in sight.

He listened to the excited council of war from behind the rampart of empty sacks which was masking his examination of the package. Quite sobered, but very curious now, he broke the seal and removed the contents of the envelope.

At the sight of them, he sat astounded for a moment. Astonishment, awe, and wonder, came into his eyes. There was a moment of silence in the dark corner, and then, with an irrepressible yell of joy, Webster arose and, with the speed of lightning, was past the group of counselling pursuers, speeding up the street again. He noticed as he passed that they still held their knives, and muttered to himself a profane prayer that their armories did not include fire-arms.

They were after him.

He dodged around another corner; and, before the triumphant yell could reach him, saw that he was in a cul-de-sac. He had barely time to back up against the wall at the end of the alley before the crowd of foreigners filled the mouth of it.

A charitable moonbeam saved his life.

By its light, the men with the daggers saw that the squat and whiskered man held something that glittered in his hand. They stood and yelled at him.

So long as he was not running and out of breath, nothing could shake the equanimity of Captain Webster. Slowly and surely he levelled his revolver. To see its muzzle rise was oddly reminiscent of those war pictures which show a howitzer being trained on the foe.

"You come any nearer, you bunch of wops," he said calmly, "and I'll fill you all so full of lead you'd do for ballast. You—tall feller! Don't you throw that knife."

The tall man yelled at him. He did not throw the knife. Instead, he turned and yelled in a dismal key for the police. One by one, his companions stopped their chatter and joined their voices with his. At the combined cry, the neighborhood awoke. Lights flashed into being at the windows. Ragged additions to the executive gathering flew up from nowhere. At the moment the captain decided to take a chance on breaking through in the confusion, the police arrived.

Two officers pushed through the crowd and halted in front of the tall man.

"What's all this?" said one of them, waving the crowd back with his club.

The tall man's doleful voice wailed out above the answering babel.

"We Branch Number Four, Polak Cloak Suit Tie Maker Lodge," he wailed. "We are in session when messenger arrives from Lodge Fifteen, which is striking. We have envelope—most important—to go to Lodge Fifteen. Messenger gives us pass-word; we hand out envelope; he cannot give us word for receipt. We open door. He run. Not lodge man at all. We chase. There he stand, envelope in pocket. Oh, take away and give to us, please, at once. He steal it."

The captain had moved from his place at the wall; and, revolver still in hand, now walked up to the policemen.

"I wouldn't believe that feller, anyway, sergeant," said he calmly. "I don't know what excuse he's been offering for rushing out on me with a gang of armed murderers, but I don't think he—has—a—truthful—eye."

His own eye fixed the tall man with a baleful glare.

"You throat-cuttin' heathen!" he ejaculated.

"What's your side of the tale?" asked the sergeant. "I suppose he didn't chase you for nothing, did he? Him and his pals?"

Innocence beamed from the face of Webster.

"All I know," said he, "is that I was sitting by the wall yonder—where the other officer saw me—contemplating the heavens, in which, as master of the steamship "Leviathan," I am interested, when suddenly this bunch comes rushing around the corner, stops near, and talks bloody murder to each other. Then, not wishing to be party to their plans, I arise with a cry, and they chase me—"

"Why did you run," said the sergeant, "if you had no reason to?"

"Would you want to be cut to ribbons?" asked Webster with interest. The policeman subsided.

"All the fellers had was shears," he said, pointing to the gleaming metal in the hands of the tall man. "They carry 'em for insignia at lodge meetings of the tie-trade."

"Well, anyway," said the captain, eyeing the shears and ignoring them, "they didn't chase me far. I backed up against this wall and asked what I was being chased for. 'Excuse me, sir,' I said to them—"

"Well," said the sergeant, "his complaint is that you stole an envelope."

"Envelope? Me? What envelope? Have I been chased this far for a condemned penny envelope? Why—"

The sergeant turned to the tall man.

"What was in that envelope?" he asked. Before the tall man could unloose his eager consonants, the captain took the floor in haste.

"Say," he cried, "I got to get back to my ship. I can't stand here talking all night. I understand that chap to say—" he skated rapidly over this thin ice—"that he didn't got a good look at the man who took his envelope. If he's willin' to take the risk of havin' you arrest me on the strength of what he saw, he can take it, and Gawd help his lodge when I bring suit against it for wrongful arrest. Or, if you want,

search me for his envelope in front of him. Here's my card—Webster,—'Leviathan,' Brooklyn; and there's my proposition. Let him take his choice. I got something better to do than talk to wops all night."

The policeman took the card—it was engraved—and saw the mighty name "Leviathan." It sounded like a Cunarder at least; and the sergeant was about due for relief.

"Say," he cried to the tall man, "if we frisk this gent right here, will that satisfy you? Right here before you? You don't mind, Captain?"

"It goes to my heart," said Webster, "but no."

The tall man consulted with the group; and the captain, watching them with an agonized unconcern, gathered from their manner that the identification was actually not very complete. Confronted with policemen and uncompromising law, the Polak Cloak Suit Tie Makers faltered.

"They say 'All right,'" the sergeant said, turning from the group at last, "providing you'll come back with them over the ground they said you ran. We'll go there first, if you don't mind, Cap'n."

They went to the pile of cement bags; members of the lodge snooped with a frenzied diligence in all the corners there and along the road where a package might have been thrown, but found nothing.

Then, under an arc-lamp, the two policemen—in whose breasts something about the whiskers of the captain seemed to kindle suspicion—gave him such a searching as would have brought to light even a pinhead of unauthorized property. They searched him twice, down to his skin and his boots; and, when the tall man suggested places for a third search, the sergeant noticed that Webster still held his revolver in a steady grip.

"You let me hold this," he said. "It might scare the crowd."

He held it while the other finished the search.

Save for sixty-three cents and a locket—which, Webster explained with offensive candor, contained a lock of his poor dear dead aunt's hair, the pockets of Captain Webster were empty. Of envelope, or of the possible contents of one, there was not a trace.

"Satisfied?" asked the sergeant, turning to the lodge members.

They were not, but the sergeant was tired. In his reasoning mind, he acquitted the captain entirely. Whiskers and rather too innocent mild blue eyes were not, he told himself, admissible as evidence.

"Well, you ought to be," he told the crowd sourly; and to the captain said, "You can go, sir; not our mistake."

He handed over the big revolver.

"Some cannon!" he remarked. "I bet you got a well-behaved crew."

"Oh, they're good lads," said the captain, "they wouldn't give *me* trouble; I ain't so young as I was, and it wouldn't be fair. Goodbye. Take the Eiffel Tower there home to cool off. If you want to know what I think of him and his envelopes—bein' a rheumatic man—"

He told them to such effect that even the sergeant smiled.

Sven Kill was still heavily asleep when his superior officer clattered light-heartedly into the cabin. The yelling of his name in tones of raucous quality and the utmost delight, only made him stir and say, "Uh!"

The captain sat down on the opposite side of the table, and shook him, until he awoke. Rubbing his eyes dazedly, he saw the captain draw the big revolver and tap with it on the table just as he had done at their previous interview.

The tapping continued and, as the astounded mate watched, he saw a roll of gold-colored paper emerge from the muzzle of the gun.

"In the barrel of that gun," said the captain, "is two thousand dollars in five-hundred-dollar bills. I'll tell you all about it in a minute. Where'd you have been if you'd had to hide 'em in your two-inch-barrel popgun? Now which is the better length?"

Before the mate could answer, a new thought struck the captain.

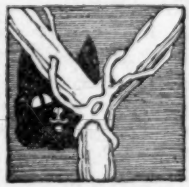
He bawled with glee, and nearly rolled off his chair.

"My gar!" he cried. "They didn't know their own money when it was pointed at 'em!"

THE ACQUITTAL OF DOCTOR GUIDAS

BY LADD PLUMLEY

A man who has been acquitted of a serious charge from lack of evidence is likely to find that some people are not convinced of his innocence, people who are never satisfied unless the prosecuting attorney secures a conviction. In this case, the real acquittal did not come until thirty years after the trial—a long time for the jury to be out.



YOU boys asked about the monument that you noticed when you came up the turnpike from fishing the stream. The monument is mixed up with the murder trial—the only murder trial I had while I was sheriff. While mother is cooking your fish for supper we'll sit out here under the horse-chestnut and I'll tell you the story.

"We've all got a streak that is born with us and I guess my streak is being awful absent-minded. And if it hadn't been for being absent-minded the night before I found the woman's body I'd never found it at all and folks wouldn't have known what they know about Doctor Guidas. Folks called him Geedas, though the real way to say it is Gydas—that's how he said it.

"It was the November when sister Sara's first came and mother had gone over to Hillsdale to take care of her. I wrestled my own dinner and stayed alone that night. And what with having prison things on my mind I made a mistake and didn't set the kitchen clock. I twisted the hands round so I could put in the winding key, then I forgot to turn the hands back again. So the clock was three hours fast and the alarm went off in the night instead of four in the morning.

"I made coffee and got my breakfast and started for the jail. It was a miserable night, black as pitch, with a dizzle of sleet and rain.

"There's a path through the meadow out to the turnpike beyond the railroad track, just over near that bunch of cattle. Beyond, you can see the top of Doctor Guidas's house, almost hidden in the maples.

"I got to the track and stumbled down the bank, but I got twisted in the dark. In them days both sides were thick with bushes and when I had crossed the rails I couldn't find the path. So I lit a match—the sulphur kind that flickers into a blue light and then flares out yellow. As the match flamed out, I saw a bundle on the rails, not fifteen feet from where I stood. I stumbled over the ties to where the bundle lay and lighted another match. I jumped back as if a black snake was lashing at my face.

"The bundle was a woman's body, wrapped in a long red cloak. It lay neat and straight right across the rails and that proved sure she hadn't been killed by a train. If she'd been killed that way she would have been thrown to one side. How the creeps ran over me! For the woman's head was cut clean off. I can't chuck it how I felt or how long I stood there before I made up my mind to do something.

"I couldn't leave the poor thing on the track. I stumbled forward and lifted the bundle and lugged it up into the bushes, dropping it mighty quick. Then I stumbled down to the track. It seemed plain that somebody had put the body on the track to cover up a killing, planning that folks would think that the woman was sitting there and was killed by an engine.

"While I stood there wondering what I'd better do, I heard a train coming. It was what we called the 'Nighthawk,' that came through about two o'clock, though, what with the clock mistake, I didn't know which train it was. I stumbled into the bushes and waited until the cars roared past. And before the rails stopped humming I heard someone coming through the bushes back of me. I kept as quiet as a ghost in a

graveyard. I thought I understood. Whoever had put the body across the track was taking the chance of coming to find out what had happened. The cut being pretty deep he hadn't seen the matches I lighted.

"I heard the fellow stumble past me and down to the ties. A moment later a match flamed out and I saw him groping here and there. Then he lit another match and a third and sneaked along in the ditches.

"I slipped the revolver I carried after I was sheriff into my side pocket and made sure I had my handcuffs with me. It was so dark I couldn't use a gun, so I lit right out and made a rush for my man.

"He heard me coming and was ready. We grappled savagely and he tried to trip me, but I wormed my hand around his throat, and when I got my grip I didn't let up until he fell on the ground with me on top. Then I pulled out my irons and snapped them on, and what with the choking he'd had and the fall on the back of his head, he was pretty much all in.

"In five minutes he began to come round, gasping and choking. Then I pulled him to his feet.

"'Keep in front,' I ordered. 'Go down the track to the signal light. My gun's nudging you in the back.'

"When we got to the light above the crossing I got a look at his face.

"'By heavens! Doctor Guidas!' I broke out. Then I asked him, 'What the devil does this mean, Doctor?'

"He answered cold-like, the same as he always spoke, 'I was on my way to see a patient. You must let me go.'

"'Perhaps it's a mistake, but it doesn't look so to me,' I answered. 'Sorry, Doctor, but it's the jail for you till there's light let in on this woman biz.'

"'You'll regret this, Sheriff,' he clicked, and beyond that he said nothing. He turned and stumbled on ahead of me.

"Doctor Guidas had come to this part of the country about ten years before the night I arrested him. He bought out the practice of old Doctor Hunt, who went to live with a son out west. Guidas was a good doctor, but from the first nobody took to him. There was something about him that gave you a kind of chill. He was thin and tall—must have stood six feet two,—and always carried his head far back and high. And when he nodded to you and said, 'Good morning, sir!' you felt that he had sized you up and that you didn't mate with what he had a right to expect. Nobody knew anything about his past and there was lots of gossip. But by the end of ten years he had made his foothold and when I was elected sheriff he was elected county doctor, and was county doctor the night I put my irons on him.

"By daylight we had three deputies out looking for the head of the woman, but it wasn't found then and it never was found, head nor skull. After the coroner's inquest the body was buried in the furthest corner of the cemetery. This shows how folks thought about it. The grave, old Deacon Middleton, before he died, made his folks promise they'd have his plot changed from near the corner and bury him way off from the grave of the headless woman.

"At the coroner's inquest the doctor wouldn't make any defense. From the time I got him to the jail that November night he begun to give us the kind of silence he gave us for thirty years. At the coroner's inquest you wouldn't have supposed that any man could keep such hobbles on his tongue. When they asked him a question they got no answer. If the question had nothing to do with finding the body he would nod or shake his head, and if it did, he'd stare at the foreman of the jury as if the foreman was the person under suspicion.

"Even before the inquest, folks got excited. I saw how things were going and swore in a lot of deputies. This is New York and people don't get worked up over a murder as they do in the South, judging from what we read. But folks didn't talk about anything but the doctor and the woman they said he murdered. Long before the trial, there were plenty of good and lawful citizens that lost their heads. I kept my deputies at the jail. They slept there and ate their meals there. And for a long time I stayed at the jail myself. When the trial came, I used to bunch my prisoner with the deputies and march him back and forth to the courthouse. We heard plenty

of threats that the doctor would never live to be executed by law. In the eyes of most folks, killing a woman is a thousand times worse than killing a man. Then to do what the doctor was thought to have done made him a kind of devil. And he had always held himself away from folks and had seemed to think so much of himself. Folks talked as if burning on a bonfire was none too good for him.

"Who the woman was no one knew, that is, they didn't know her name. But even before it was proved at the trial, folks believed that she was a young woman who had been seen lots of times at the railroad station and always bought a ticket to New York. Several times she'd been seen coming out of the doctor's office. There were two or three young men in town who gave her a nice high-flavored reputation. Folks said that she was a bad one, and that the doctor's private life hadn't been what folks supposed it had.

"At that time the county had the most 'get-there' prosecuting attorney this county ever had. Good as he was, though, it was proved at the trial he was no match for the lawyer who was assigned to the prisoner. For Doctor Guidas wouldn't employ counsel; said he would be his own counsel. But the judge appointed Amos Nichols. A couple of years afterward Amos went down to New York and we hear that he's a big lawyer down there, one of the biggest that ever came from up the state, and we've sent our share of big lawyers to New York.

"If it hadn't been for Amos the jury would have brought in a verdict of guilty. But though feeling against him ran so high that it must have counted lots with the jury, Amos won out. Lots of things the state proved. It was shown that the woman had come up from New York on a morning train the day before I found the body. It was also shown that she spent the afternoon with two of the town's giddy young fellows, drinking in a saloon near the station. It was proved that she was seen going into the doctor's house just about dark, but nothing more was proved. From the time a groceryman, who was driving up the street near the doctor's, saw her go up the steps of the doctor's office, nothing more was seen of her until I found her body.

"So the doctor got off by the fringe of his eyebrows and for years we expected that other evidence would poke up its head and bring a new trial. I thought that when we let him out of jail he would be lynched, but you can't figure on public opinion. From the time the jury disagreed, folks settled down and began to talk about something else. He didn't go away,—stayed right here,—but he took no chances. It was months before he showed his face, and when he did, he walked the streets just as he always had, holding up his head same as he always did. Proud as ever—that's what he was—perhaps a mite prouder. But during his jailing and the trial his hair went from coal black to snow white. And as far as his practice was concerned he was ruined. No one thought of sending for him. The wonder was that he didn't move away.

"This is a fine horse country—it's the water—and the doctor was always fond of horses. He started a stock farm and within ten years he was making big money. It was about then that he began to give his services to them who couldn't pay for doctoring. And for the next twenty years there was never any one sick that the doctor wasn't ready to help, day and night. Once in a while he was called to assist at an operation, for the other doctors set a lot of store by him. But no one ever heard of his sending in a bill.

"But the silence he gave this town! It was like meeting a dumb man. And the thought of what lay in the corner of the cemetery made lots of people keep away from him as they would keep away from a man with the smallpox. There were silly young folks who said that they were afraid to go past the doctor's house at night, but as years went on there was less and less of that talk, until the time came when, unless you was a stranger and folks wanted to tell you about everybody, you heard nothing about the doctor.

"Then came a wreck on the railroad that was the most fearful wreck we ever had in this part of the state. The doctor was in

the wreck. He had been asked to help in an operation down the line and had started as he always did when he was needed. He was hurt bad. Although he must have suffered something fearful, he managed to crawl here and there and do things for others. When the relief train got to the wreck they found Doctor Guidas, fainted dead away, over a man whose mashed leg he had been trying to bandage. They brought the doctor home and ten days later he died.

"During the ten days there was a string of folks that the doctor had helped coming all the time.

"You glimpsed the monument. We think it's pretty nifty. The money was raised by subscription and the committee said that it would have been mighty easy to yank in ten times what it cost. And the thing about it is that when the money was raised folks didn't know but what Doctor Guidas was a murderer. After all, though, everybody had forgotten they ever thought that. Things hang together. Murderers don't act the way the doctor did for thirty years; so folks weren't surprised when it all come out.

"A month after the monument had been put up, I went over to the doctor's place to look at a horse that his executor had for sale. As there were no near relatives, his money was left for a town hospital. We've never had what you might call a real hospital. They've broken ground and if you come up for the fall shooting, you'll see in brick what Doctor Guidas left our town.

"As I began to say, I went over to look at the horse. It was a hot August day and the old housekeeper asked me if I wouldn't like a glass of cold milk. I stepped into the doctor's office and waited. It is in a wing, with a long passage that runs back to the house. While I waited for the milk I looked around. Except when we was searching for evidence, it was the only time I was ever in the doctor's office. The room was filled with the things that you would expect to see in a doctor's office, only the doctor, being a breeder of horses, there was horse books mixed in with doctors' books. There were some other things in the office that were not mixed with horses or doctoring, and I noticed an old army musket above the fireplace. At the murder trial it had been brought out that when he was nothing but a boy the doctor had been in the civil war.

"I walked over and looked at a picture of three soldiers with only a hint of hair on their lips, on the mantel. Then, being a gun sharp, I reached up and lifted down the musket. I wondered if it was a smooth bore or rifled and I saw that it was smooth. I pulled out the ramrod and pushed it down the barrel, and when I tried to pull it out it stuck fast; so, bracing the stock between my feet, I gave a good yank and out came the ramrod, and wrapped around the head of it was a wad of stiff, white paper. I smoothed the paper out and I saw that it was one of those three for a quarter photos, of a mighty pretty girl. There was a letter scrawled on the back of the picture.

"The picture is a part of the county records now. That night I turned it over. A gun barrel was about the only place that the searchers for evidence at the time of the trial would never think of.

"The letter on the back of the picture told how a daughter had brought the most awful disgrace on a father that a girl can bring. It asked for his forgiveness and said that she had come to the place where her death would be the only way out. She put it that she would lock herself in and use a pistol that she carried with her. She said that the picture would remind her father of how she used to look, but the doctor must have known it would prove who she was. Proud as he was, he tried to fix things up so nobody could find out, no matter what happened. But I figure it that he'd always kept the confession in the gun barrel so that he could save himself. Most likely if he hadn't been acquitted he'd have used it.

"You'd like to know about what was never buried in the corner of the cemetery, —the poor thing's head? I don't think any one will ever find out about that. The doctor knew how to keep a secret just about as well as a secret can be kept."

CONSCIENCE STUFF FOR TWO

BY LOUIS SCHNEIDER

Petey's case of wanderlust was as chronic as arterio sclerosis. One day he flipped a fast freight; and shortly after, friends viewed a shredded corpse and a green-checked mackinaw. The mourners' bench wasn't particularly crowded; a girl named Peggy did most of the weeping, and even she didn't stay there long. Perhaps she suspected a sequel to Petey's demise.

EVERYBODY in Goveland knew the rod-riding flea's life that Petey Streams led, and everybody expected almost anything of him, but nobody expected him to turn up safe and sound after a trackwalker somewhere south of the Junction had found the gruesome remnants of what had been a human being scattered along the track for several hundred yards, also the tattered remnants of a showy green-checked mackinaw in a pocket of which were some of Petey's letters and his much-becarved pipe.

Even without the mackinaw the evidence would have been considered conclusive, and the verdict in Goveland was that Petey had hopped his last train—that he was now finally free from the pangs of periodic wanderlust. No one particularly mourned for him,—not even his elderly, simple-minded aunt, with whom he had dwelt when he took a momentary rest from his travelling. So long as she had had a home she had been satisfied. Now that she had none—

To say that no one mourned Petey may be putting it too strong. Peggy Morton doubtless did, in her odd way; but where Petey was concerned, Peggy had always been odd. She got possession of and treasured up, the old pipe that had once been Petey's, and her face began to have a lean, hungry look, very similar to the lean, hungry look Petey always had.

She made no open demonstration, but people noticed and remarked. That Peggy, the only child of the town's richest banker plus skinflint, considered something of a flapper and just out of high school and her teens, ever should have taken the slightest fancy to a will-o'-the-wisp like Petey, was more than the proverbial nine days' wonder. Why, Mrs. Gault, with all her other troubles besides, didn't take it so hard!

Mrs. Gault was Petey's aunt. She had had a very neat little house on a very neat little street, left to her by a late husband. Petey, being her only known kin, ordinarily would have been expected to assume the role of provider of the house, but this he failed to do. When the open road called, Petey sent no proxy or substitute. So Mrs. Gault, having been in the eye of old Morton for some time, considered and accepted an offer made by him, her funds in the bank having dwindled until there threatened to be as few figures to the left of the decimal point in her balance as there were to the right.

Morton proposed, since Petey could not reasonably be depended on and she herself might not be able to make her own living, that she deed the property to him. He would pay her a stated small sum each week as long as she lived and she would also have full use and control of the house. At least, that is what she said afterward, but the contract which both she and Morton produced when she entered complaint because he wanted to put her out of the house, said nothing about the use and control part. So she was ousted from her own house, for Morton knew where he could rent it for more than twice as much a week as he was paying her.

Petey was out on a rod-riding jaunt at the time, and when he came in at dead of night and tried to slip in at a rear window of the house that had always been home to him, he was met by a fusillade of grimly-intended but laughably-directed cold lead from the new householder. The scare and indignity served quite as much to stir his

anger as did the facts which led up to the incident, and for once in his life Morton heard at least a part of the town's convictions regarding himself. Petey delivered them.

"Old man," he summed up, "with scoundrels selling at twenty-seven cents a gross, retail, you'd be worth a million bucks, bankrupt manufacturer's price."

Morton had a snappy way of his own, but on this occasion he didn't put any of it into words. He wasn't a large man, but his thirty per cent more of compact flesh than Petey's whirled on his revolving chair, laid hand on Petey's arm, and rushed Petey toward the open door. Almost there, Petey stumbled and did a fancy twist. Somehow he got mixed up with Morton's legs, and the next second the back of Morton's head thumped the floor, while Petey stood with his hands flaring the skirts of his coat away from his hips, his feet set far apart.

"Ex-cuse me," he bowed. "Slippery ways are bad for old feet. Use Square Deal talks,—reminds me,—are you going to give aunt a square deal?"

Morton had abandoned silence when his head quit spinning and, aside from what was purely personal, Petey gathered that Aunt Gault had had as square a deal as she was going to get in the matter. That Petey should get out of the office instanter didn't need gathering; it came in an unmistakable lump of words.

Petey drew a long breath, and his hunching shoulders forced his chin out in a manner that made the old man back away. After ten seconds Petey let the breath escape in a short laugh.

"Right. Gone. Not even staying long enough for you to tell me this time to keep away from Peggy. And, say, listen. I'll fix you. You'll see. Right, too."

He strutted out. Ten steps ahead of him on the street was Peggy. He doubled his pace to catch up to her. At the approaching staccato of his heels she turned. Mutual smiles of pleasure were exchanged, and her raised sunshade changed hands.

"Which way?" queried Petey.

"Anywhere."

"In particular?"

"No."

"Straight ahead, then."

They proceeded to the end of the street and to the crown of the hill overlooking the ball park. Petey whipped off his coat and spread it on the ground. Peggy snuggled down on it.

"Like old times," he said, as he stretched himself at her feet.

"Just."

He rummaged in a pocket of the coat and drew out pipe and tobacco tin. With the pipe well going, he began to talk.

He went into the details of his latest jaunt, talking leisurely and making illuminating comments as he went. Peggy listened in silence. Finally he stopped, his pipe dead, his head cradled in his clasped fingers against a mossy stone.

"Sometimes—I almost wish—I could hit the road too," breathed Peggy.

He turned his head lazily.

Far beyond the ball grounds a train whistled a crossing and Petey sat up suddenly. A freight was creeping out into the open country, slow on an up-grade, the lazy shimmer of midsummer heat investing its length with the lure of dancing outlines.

"There'd be a peach of a place to flip her," he commented.

With a tantalizing slowness the freight dragged itself through a cut and called again from beyond, faintly.

"You were gone ninety-three days this last time," said Peggy, in a little voice, after a time.

He took the tobacco tin from her hand and surveyed it. All the lines of lettering had been scratched neatly from its sides, and the red fields left between. Down from the top the fields had been scored with crosses; some with more, some with less. He checked off the lowest line of them with his finger.

"Ninety-three—yes."

"You're staying away longer each time."

"Longer I stay—farther I get away—harder I hit it when I get started back. Say, I beat it back a hundred miles once this trip to get this old can. Left it setting under a culvert by a camp fire."

"You didn't want to lose your tally of the days?"

"Well, there's this piece of art work of yours on the lid."

He indicated two hearts transfixed by an arrow, scratched on the bright tin.

"Why do you stay away longer every time? Some time you'll—starve."

He gave her a quick glance, but she was tracing the design on the box. "If anybody eats, I eat," he laconized. Then he laughed shortly. "Don't you worry. Some day I'll maybe stay away so long I'll never want to leave when I get back."

After a while she broke the silence. "You—your aunt must feel—Dad—"

"Never mind," he put in. "That's nothing between you and—anybody. Let's get back to town. Say, Billy Lockput tells me there's a home talent show on day after tomorrow night. Let's see it."

The night of the show very naturally came around, but, almost quite as naturally, Petey did not. By that time there was a new scratch on a new field on his red tobacco tin.

Peggy and the home town experienced many happenings before they saw Petey again, but the feelings and actions of the two did not correspond, for when Petey dropped out again, the town scarcely noticed it; Peggy did.

When word came three days later about the human remnants and tatters of the green mackinaw having been found below the Junction, the town callously said the fitting thing, as it saw it; Peggy drooped, and her face took on the lean and hungry look.

When, three months later, old Morton's safe was blown open and rifled while a political jollification was on, the firing of numerous anvil salvos hiding the explosion, the town threw a young fit and Morton tried to find a clue by which to trace the offender, but without result; Peggy kept calm, grew thoughtful, won back some of the roses in her cheeks, and no longer carried flowers to place on Petey's grave.

When, about a month later, old Morton made his annual trip East with a grip full of farm mortgages to sell, and while he was away a package of banknotes to the amount of about two thousand dollars came to Mrs. Gault by plain mail, the town remarked that that was about the value of the property that Morton had beaten the old lady out of, and said something about "conscience" in a wondering tone, as though they had suspected nothing of the sort in his makeup; Peggy got some of her smiles back. She also got hold of Mrs. Gault and turned the old lady's thought to the buying of a small farm just outside town.

Then, after almost everybody had forgotten Petey, to the surprise of everybody —except to Peggy, who took it calmly— Petey came back. He told a rapid tale of having crossed the ocean on a cattle-ship —having been picked up and chucked into an English prison,—"'count of the war, you know,"—of finally being freed, and of having worked his way back. "B'lieve me, I shined more brass and peeled more spuds that trip than I ever thought there were in the world!

"That green mackinaw and my letters and pipe? Traded that to Canada Jack for this red one. Ain't it a beaut? Must have forgotten the pipe and all that.

"Heard somebody cracked old man Morton's box and got away with some coin. Darn old shark! Serves him right. Wish it had been me. Darnfidon't! Eh? No! Two thousand dollars? Say, I'm going to stay and help her spend it. She put it in a chicken ranch? Oh, cackle! Where's the place?"

That afternoon he came into town again, carrying his aunt's copy of the contract between her and Morton.

"Here y'are," he clipped as he shredded the paper under the old man's nose. "Wrong to have you making any more payments to her when your conscience hurt you so bad you had to come across with the worth of the property you beat her out of. Glad to know about that,—not like you,—good sign, though. Maybe it means you'll mend your ways. I have mine."

The pressure of Morton's feelings seemed to rise to the danger point, but Petey's little air of seeing quite through the old man's soul out of the corner of eyes which seemed to be concerned with nothing but the view framed by the window, was too much. He curbed himself and swung back to his desk.

"Get out!" he husked.

Petey's wide-set heels clicked together and he brought an akimboed hand to a salute.

"Gone."

He went around to see Peggy.

"I'm thy Petey's ghost," he announced dramatically, as she answered his ring. "Surprise you? Scare you?"

"No. I knew your step. The only difference is, your heels come down quite a bit surer. Come in here, and tell me about—everything."

"Wish we could go out to the hill," he remarked as he settled down in a chair. "Too cold, though."

"Here's your old pipe. Start it going."

He turned the old brier this way and that, brought out his tobacco tin, filled up, and applied a match. Then he started his story while she played idly with the tin.

"When was it you started across on that cattle-boat?" she asked at one point.

He said nothing for several seconds. He fixed his eyes full and steady upon her, but she did not look up.

"Let—me—see; sometime late in October, I think."

She nodded, and he went on with the story. When he had finished, she looked up with a little shudder.

"That—that Candy Jack—"

"'Canada' Jack," laughed Petey.

"Well, Canada Jack, then, but— Oh, Peter, if that had been you!"

"'Peter!'" Petey dropped the dead pipe with which he had been toying, and bounded to his feet. "Whew! 'Peter!' Since when?"

"Since, oh, ever so long!"

He swept quick arms about her. "Listen to me, Peggy. I'm through. Seen lots of the world, and there's nothing to it. Nor to the way I've seen it. I'm through, and that's straight. Listen. Anybody can make aunt do anything. She's easy, and I'm going to do her for the good of everybody concerned. Get your bets down she's going to let me raise two eggs out on her place in nests where not even a cackle grew before. Peggy Morton, you're going to get your wraps on—right now—and we're going to dig up a license and face the first preacher we can find. I've gathered a little moss of my own while I was rolling, but at the best, it'll be some come-down for a banker's daughter. I hope the old man won't cut up too rough."

"He won't. I know he won't. He's—he's different since people here know about that 'conscience' money your aunt got fixed on him. Oh, it couldn't help but get around to us, in a town like this, Peter."

"You'll do it?" He shook her.

"If—you'll—let me go."

When she came back, ready for the street, Petey was rummaging about, the old pipe in his left hand.

"Is this what you're looking for?" she asked, extending a tobacco tin.

"Surest thing. I'm so flustered I need it for my nerves."

"How long were you gone this last time, Peter?"

"Long enough to scratch up three red streaks on the old can. No more of that for Pete,—Peter, I mean. See here,—two hundred and sevent— Why, say, that's not the can I—"

"I know it isn't, Peter," she said, as she calmly held his overcoat ready for him to slip into. "But it is the right can. I happened to go down to the bank with Dad on the morning after the safe was blown, and I found this can where you had come through the window at the back. The record of days had been kept right up to that time, so I knew."

"And after knowing all that—" gulped Petey.

"It's done us all a world of good," suggested Peggy.

"If it wasn't that the property's worth every bit of what—what the old man was stung for, I'd feel worse than I do; might have to take a big dose of that conscience stuff myself. As it is, if you go ahead with this, Peggy, you may be a convict's wife some of these days."

"I'll risk it. I'm the only one that has real evidence, and—they can't make a wife testify against her husband, anyway. No—no—stop! Get into this overcoat, Peter Streams!"

"Yes, ma'am," acquiesced Peter. "Afterward, though, there's a true story I want to tell you."

SLICKS AN' SLICKERS

BY GEORGE THOMAS ARMITAGE

In the cattle country, men who put their brands on other men's cows are as common as their city brothers who sign checks with other men's names. You will meet one or two in this tale and you will find as much action as in all the other stories of the issue combined.

OLL out!"

The dish-pan echoed a wild tattoo.

Cheyenne Bill's lanky two yards wiggled—just a trifle. It was "Cheyenne" for short.

"Ugh-gosh," followed another volley from the much abused tinware.

Watt yelled: "Come alive you punchers! Goin' ta lay on bed-groun' all day?"

Watt was boss; his command bore weight.

"Damn!" ejaculated Cheyenne, emphatically. His bed was canvas to canvas with Watt's.

"Same here," said Watt, "but she's gotta be done."

Cheyenne kicked back his "tarp." Dew-stiff it crackled. Stars blushed at his *exposé;* clear-topped hills hinted daybreak.

Regretfully, protestingly, the cowman's lean prayer-shanks drew slowly from a warm hole cuddled under the sougans; shot back again for one last cosy "feel," then braved the chill of a Montana morning—in the open.

Watt's bed was already rolled.

"Big doin's t'day, Cheyenne—and t'night, too," he said, in a low tone. "Better get a move on."

Cheyenne wagged his tousled "bean."

"Nothin' stirrin', Watt. I been thinkin' all night an' I can't do it."

"S—h," the boss nodded warningly toward the animated open-air bedroom where a dozen punchers cussed into belts and boots.

"We'll fight it out on the Ridge," he added.

In a greasy "vest," serving the double role of carry-all and nightshirt, Cheyenne discovered "makin's." Matches were popping in the semi-darkness of 4 A. M. Cigarettes glowed and Cheyenne inhaled about a quart of the aromatic fumes. It warmed him; it cheered his slumbering corpuscles. He sprang up and his shirt-tail snapped with the breeze.

"Come an' get 'er 'fore I throw it in th' mud!"

Sap Eye bellowed his "last call." Cow-puncher haberdashery flew. No one doubted the cook's ultimatum.

Beds plunked into the wagon box. Chaps were hastily buckled and spurs jammed on heel.

Watt saw the remuda. "Throw 'er inta ya quick, boys, here's the horses!"

Blear-eyed punchers fought through the grease-wood toward a hazy blotch where a burning stump of tallow mussed a cracker box.

"Grab yer Java an' don't be slow," was Sap Eye's "good morning."

Toilet? No! It was a "dry" camp; water was scarce—cold, too.

The sputtering wax showed the crew squatted, Indian-fashion, in the corners. Cheyenne's eyes sought Watt's, clashed, and looked back to beefsteak.

"Where's th' 'cow'?" the Duke whined.

"Drink yer Java straight, granger. It'll make hair grow on yer chest." Sap Eye spoke convincingly. Cheyenne nodded approbation.

For the Duke and the Duck, who bunked together, had stumbled in last, as usual, and got no smiling welcome.

Cheyenne's think-box rattled. "I gotta turn Watt down; I gotta ditch my pal," clicked in his "dome" and it wrinkled.

In a tin cup was Watt's whole morning meal. His cast-iron stomach warmed with the boiling coffee—unembellished, and topped by many "pills." Dark lashes seemed

closed, but flitting pupils saw everything, mostly Cheyenne. He called a mental roll of the cowboys—coatless, shivering. They'd be sweating soon enough, he mused.

"Where's the flap-jacks?" demanded the Duke.

Something was always missing around that chuck wagon for the Duke and the Duck.

"Ferget it!" Sap Eye leered through his one good and glowing orbit.

The Duke did.

Watt sprang from his "crouch." Five minutes was too long for breakfast.

"Rope top horses. You'll need 'em t'day," he ordered.

Tinware bombarded the dish-pan. The Duke and the Duck sadly scraped their "leavin's." Cigarettes dropped from lips shortly crossed with spuds.

Two hundred mounts, fresh from their all-night graze, tore the dust in the rope corral. The horses jammed, breasts out, as tangled lassos went flying; ears ducked and wiggled.

There was a whirl and a snap; Cheyenne's "R. L. Baldy" backed out like a gentleman. His eyes popped comprehensively as the loop flew high over the mass of manes and nicely noosed his nose.

The Duke caught four heads in his wild throw and nearly stampeded the bunch. Cowboys cursed to the rescue when the Duck tried for a head and got a front leg.

Horses were "sunfishin'" in the rocks, taking out the morning kinks. The Kid had fallen on some cactus bushes, but said nothing. Cow-punching was something rather new for him.

The Duke and the Duck jointly jeered at the fallen one.

"Shut up, you Muntgumery Ward cowboys," Cheyenne commanded, glaring hotly. "He's learnin' anyhow. Youse guys ain't got guts enough ta tackle a bad 'un!"

The Duke and the Duck had the tamest "string" in the remuda, and "pulled leather," at that.

Four beefy browns stamped at the bed wagon tongue; four monstrous greys were in collar at the "pie" wagon. Cowboys grabbed bridles as the traces snapped.

"Got yer cayuses?"

"You bet!"

"Down corral!"

Ropes disappeared; the mess tent vanished. Sap Eye's last pan banged into the grub box. Half a beef went aboard in canvas. Hands grabbed the stove. They weren't the Duke's nor the Duck's.

Sap Eye's dirty ball of bacon grease and denim rolled up to the spring seat. Trampled buffalo grass, a few tin cans and some ashes, were the only evidences of a one-night stand. The leaders snorted and pawed the earth.

"Gimme the ribbons!"

Seattle Sid tossed Sap Eye the reins.

"Tu'n 'em loose!"

Eight brawny necks smashed their collars. Brake-beams clanged free; two lashes squirmed. Watt waved Seattle Sid ahead of the four-in-handers.

"You're pilot t'day. Throw 'em on Dry Springs an' wait fer me."

"Foller my dust!" Sap Eye yelled, and Lee answered, "Get outa my way!"

The race of fours was on; so was the round-up!

The boss loped up the Ridge; cowboy consorts followed. Already goos-fleshed skins were thawing. The sun suggested a scorcher as Watt waved his men by twos down into the distant ranges. The big circle had started.

"Bring every hoof," he commanded them. "Gotta clean up in here t'day. Throw 'em into the Basin an' wait fer me."

Always it was "wait fer me" with Watt.

As the last cowboy vanished in a deep canyon to skim its ridges and to take its offering of hide and hair to the round-up, Watt pulled up on "Walkin' Man." Cheyenne knew what was coming. Together their eyes slid for a moment down the long slopes and peeked into cracks and crevices of the range-land.

"She'll be a hummer, Cheyenne," Watt evaded the big issue.

"I'd tell a man!" Cheyenne admitted.

They twisted a smoke.

"I'll take a look at the Pocket like I said yesterday," Watt told his top hand. "You beat it down and see Seattle puts camp on decent water. We'll be about needed at the round-up then, and wait fer me."

Cheyenne unlimbered for the ride.

"Goin' ta brand them slicks with me t'night?" the boss stopped him.

"I can't do it, Watt, like I told you 'fore breakfast."

"Why, ain't we friends?"

"Sure, an' so's me'n the Ole Gent."

Watt eyed Cheyenne carefully.

"You'n me's been on the trail a long time together."

"You bet!"

"What we got for it?"

Cheyenne didn't answer; Watt did.

"What we got? I'll tell you. I get $75 a month fer wagon boss; you drag $50 as top hand. The Duke an' the Duck get almost that an' they don't know beans. Is that square? Not by a darn sight. Then ya don't owe the Ole Gent nothin'. Buy yer saddle an' fixin's; ain't much left fer Christmas, huh?"

There was a dullness in Cheyenne's eyes that admitted Watt's argument, but there was determination, too."

Watt continued: "You take the kid, fer instance. He ain't much better, but he's got the idey and tries. You bet the Duke and the Duck don't."

"I told 'em where ta head in when they guyed the Kid this A. M. "There was a temporary gleam in Cheyenne's eyes. "But this shore ain't shovin' them critters outa the coulees. Let's be driftin'."

"Pretty pronto, Cheyenne, but how about stickin' yer brand onto them slicks in the Pocket?"

"How do ya know them mavericks's there?"

Watt scrutinized Cheyenne carefully before answering:

"Ever since the Duke and the Duck passed up the Pocket at the spring round-up I've suspected there was some calves there what didn't get branded."

Cheyenne looked squarely at the boss.

"I was leadin' circle that day, Watt, an' I remember sendin' 'em to the Pocket, an' tellin' how to get in. I think they did."

Watt went on easily: "I don't. They swore they brought that buncha white-faces outa there, but I know the white-faces was in Cottonwood canyon. Nope, them slicks is there now, 'less some un else's grabbed 'em. Anyhow, I'll know darn soon."

"You're kiddin' me, ain't ya, Watt?"

"Do I act like I's kiddin'? Throw in with me and we'll pull the deal."

Cheyenne straightened in his stirrups and "R. L." felt a tightening of rein. The grey-eyed range roamer peered down into the valleys that were giving him $50 a month and keep. Why should he buckle down for years to a millionaire company that almost hated to give him a winter job? But a whiff of breeze braced him and he smiled back at Watt. His mind was free.

"What you do is Jake with me, Watt. Go to it. But I've looked the Ole Gent in the eye too long. Mebbe I ain't worth more'n $50 a month. He ought ta know." Cheyenne took a long breath for it was a long speech for him. "But it's just like ya never told no one with me knowin', Watt. I'm mum."

A peculiar light that Cheyenne did not exactly understand entered Watt's eyes; something hard went up and down in his neck and he stared vacantly far out into the cow country spaces where the valleys were already belching forth their full quota of hoofs and hides.

"Put 'er there, Cheyenne; I'll play the game alone," he said feelingly.

Two calloused paws clenched; two pairs of eyes met and looked away; two cow ponies jogged apart.

In the Pocket Watt found just what he expected to find.

"Jest what I figgered," he explained to Walkin' Man, who didn't care what Watt "figgered," with plenty of high grass here for an occasional mouthful.

"Jest what I figgered. It sure is easy pickin's."

A small but impressive army of red-skinned, pot-bellied old mammies whirled into action front and stood staring with a row of belligerent horns presented at the strange horseman as he approached. Cowboys came seldom to this tiny hidden haven of water and shelter and grass; no visiting bovine ever braved the cool reception offered at the canyon's mouth by this seclusive set. The dozen odd cows had "squatted" here and they were not to be

"unsquatted" without a fight. Of course a man was different, but he needn't come too often nor get too gay. The mothers baaed for calves as Watt inspected them. Thoughts of the searing iron that had scorched their own sides in infancy made them nervous for their still unbranded young. But the calves fed right on.

Watt counted fifteen calves; thought a moment; then whirled Walkin' Man out of the luxuriant pasture, with no apologies to his indignant mount, and hit a high lope for camp and the round-up where it was, "Wait for me."

As if a terrific whirlwind had devastated those hills and vales, blowing every living thing into the center of the storm, the circle riders had combed the rocks and ridges for their quarry and pushed them into the valley. The hills rained cattle; dogies poured from the plateau; gullies took up the torrent of beef and flooded the mad, indignant stream into the Basin. Critters piled into a hot, bawling mass of dust and alkali as drive met drive and hide rubbed hide.

Watt rode around the flood of flesh. The last drive was bellowing into the melee; lathering horses raced to hold the tide; thousands of hoofs tore the earth to cast it up in a great storm of dust and muck; hundreds of range-prowlers were angry and they said so—loud. The surf of horns rolled; the waves of heads sparkled in the sun as Watt rode up to Cheyenne and told him the calves were in the Pocket.

Cheyenne's voice was calm, but his eyes twitched as he answered, "All right, let's hit the round-up."

Into the crowding hordes rode Watt, now captain of the round-up. Cheyenne followed. Cowboys tightened their watch. Watt pointed Walkin' Man at a "79" cow with calf, and out of the herd they shot and into the branding "cut." Cheyenne and R. L. found another mother and baby, and so the "cuttin" went on.

Heat poured down into the boiling caldron of dirt and sweat; dust lifted at times, seasoned with alkali, and showed the stamping critters and the cowboys holding them at bay. But the spring round-up had been thorough—outside the Pocket—and most of the branding had been then. By eleven o'clock Watt followed the last cow with calf from the maelstrom. Around the undulating mass he loped, picking up cowboys as he went. Nosey and Seattle and Doc stayed to hold the herd during dinner.

"Last one ta camp's a sheepherder," Watt yelled suddenly.

Out over the cacti, through sage-brush, past an alkali flat, tore the hungry rangers. Mounts knew their day's work was through and their nostrils dilated for the race. Cutbanks, prairie dog holes, rocks and boulders, had no terrors for them. Watt led on Walkin' Man, now a "Runnin' Man," the fastest horse in the remuda. There was a mile of flapping stirrups and a "yip-yip-yip." The Kid's Arab reeled in a badger hole; Cheyenne ripped past, righting the white-faced boy and the falling horse. They raced into camp and saddles hit the ground. The Kid was the "goat." Horses went flying to freedom.

"Darn glad I ain't no sheepherder," the Duke told the Duck loudly.

Their usually uncalled-for remarks were continually irritating Cheyenne.

"Youse guys wouldn't even make good wooley-wranglers. They gotta know somethin'," he sharply informed the boasters.

Watt ate until he could hold no more; drank deep of cold spring water and staggered erect. "Rope yer cuttin' horses and hit fer the round-up," was his terse order, and the dash was on again.

If Cheyenne imagined anxiety in Watt's eyes as they rode to the branding, he was wrong; if he thought Watt was worrying about the night's work he also missed it. Automatically Cheyenne roped and dragged the bawling chunks of tender flesh to the branding fire as he marveled at the sudden change in Watt.

The sun was setting when the last throbbing little side was marked in signs of fire and the herd of branded babies wobbled back to the big bunch to the tune of mothers' indignant bellows.

But there was another branding party ahead for Watt, a party with unheralded developments.

The men were at supper when two horsemen approached.

"It's the Ole Gent," Watt cried, springing up to welcome his boss.

The Ole Gent shook hands around and found a plate and cup.

"Eastern land buyer," he said, with a wave towards his companion.

Shortly they were in their saddles, on fresh horses.

"Stay the night," Watt said. "We can rustle a bed."

"Gotta make the home ranch t'night," the Ole Gent explained. He looked at the sky. "May rain, too. We'll have to ramble some."

They were gone. Cheyenne breathed easier—for Watt. Cheyenne knew that nothing would stop Watt if he had made up his mind, but burning hair smells a long way and calves bawl loud.

At ten o'clock Nosey poked Cheyenne's slats, growled, "Second guard," and Cheyenne came to life. Watt still slumbered, but Cheyenne saw that the boss's night horse was saddled, picketed, and ready for midnight work. In two minutes Cheyenne and the Kid were riding side by side to relieve the first guard punchers.

The herd had quieted to a brown blotch, showing up dark and irregular in a little hollow under the moon. Steers were down and only one stray cow wandered aimlessly, with doleful mooings, in search of her baby, lost in the shuffle.

The Kid and Cheyenne separated to meet periodically on each side as they ambled quietly around the night herd. Cheyenne thought about Watt and the Pocket, of $50 per, and being "straight." The Kid mused of a little girl down at the Crossing who admitted she always had liked cowboys. Suddenly the adventurous youth spurred his "Tiny" up to meet Cheyenne.

"I heard something t'day I think I oughta tell ya," he said.

Cheyenne was in no mood for conversation, but the Kid usually kept his mouth shut.

"Spit 'er out," he commanded.

"I heard the Duke and the Duck say somethin' 'bout meetin' at midnight in the Pocket. What's that for?"

The Kid might just as well have kicked Cheyenne in the face.

"Goin' ta meet in the Pocket?" he said, disbelievingly.

"Yep, an' there was somethin' else 'bout it's bein' their last chance an' bein' the biggest haul yet."

Cheyenne blinked—yapp-mouthed, stunned.

"They're on third guard, right after us, ain't they?" continued the Kid.

"Yep," Cheyenne answered the question absently. "Boss put 'em there 'cause then the herd's asleep just like them," but mentally he questioned wildly, "Fer God's sake is Watt in cahoots with the Duke and the Duck?"

It was too great a shock for Cheyenne's already troubled sensibilities to grasp immediately. He sat staring at the Kid while the scheme percolated through his dazed mind.

"They've found Watt's cache in the Pocket," he reasoned, "an' don't know it's his. They think they've got a sure thing and they'll run into Watt. Then there'll be hell ta pay. Somethin's gotta be done, quick—but what?"

"I wanta ask ya just one more question," said the Kid, "an' then I'll beat it 'round the herd and see if everything's O. K."

"Shoot!"

"Why's the stock inspector with the Ole Gent?"

"He ain't. It's a eastern land buyer."

"Land buyer, nothin'! He's the new inspector. I saw him at the state fair last fall."

Surprises were coming too fast for Cheyenne. "What was the inspector doin' with the Ole Gent? An' passin' off fer some un else!"

It was past him. The whole proposition was a muddle. He'd better keep his hands out of the mess. But could he, with Watt liable to discovery by the Duke and the Duck. No! Way back in his brain an idea formulated; suddenly it crashed out: "Stick the grangers and save the boss."

Action was Cheyenne's middle name.

"Kid, how'd ya like ta make a fast ride, right now,—the fastest ya can?"

"Where to?"

Cheyenne looked at the guard watch. Ten minutes of midnight,—almost time!

"You call the Duke and the Duck now for the third guard, then hit fer the home ranch. Ride like hell an' don't stop till ya ketch the Ole Gent."

The youthful puncher sat straight and ready. "What'll I tell the Ole Gent?"

"That I've gone to stop some cattle stealin' in the Pocket!"

"Can I come back with 'em?" the Kid asked, turning his Tiny to camp.

"Sure!" yelled Cheyenne at the flying horseman.

When the Duke and the Duck appeared, Cheyenne silently resigned the guard watch to them. They were silent,—and nervous, too, Cheyenne thought.

Cheyenne picked his way noiselessly among scattered spots of white about the bed wagon to his own "tarp," where he took out his old .45. With the big gun buckled at his hip he thrilled. This was real business, the same as the old days. His blood tingled for the clash.

"Big business t'night is right," he grimly reiterated Watt's own assertion.

Carefully he led his "Sickem" out of the maze of bed and stake ropes and found the trail that led toward the Pocket, where he expected to catch two tenderfeet in tender business; where unbranded, unsuspecting calves, dreamed peacefully, and where he hoped that Watt would "wait fer me."

Cheyenne swung through the dark shadows of the moonlit canyon into the Pocket at a fast gallop; Sickem bounded out into the pen grass and up to the shaky remnants of an old horse corral. "Slicks," awakened from their sleep, scampered up. Mothers, unaccustomed to midnight intrusion, lunged to hoof from the tall grass. In a clump of pines near the corral, Cheyenne hid Sickem. There was no sign of Watt.

"Queer where the boss is," he ruminated. "Sure don't look like he was havin' any brandin' party."

Then he started forward and listened.

"Horses, sure! Bet it's the Duke and the Duck!"

Cheyenne's eyes strained through the pine needles as the hoof beats slowed, then ceased. The horses had left the hard path for the soft grass. Shortly the little "cavee" of mammies and babies were milling inside the corral. Cheyenne recognized the Duke and the Duck. He wasn't a minute too soon; still no Watt.

"Start the fire while I practice heelin'," Cheyenne heard the Duke say to the Duck. Cheyenne thought there was considerable shakiness in the tone and chuckled softly.

"Guess he'd better try, all right," he whispered to Sickem, who was also all attention. "He needs lots of practice from what I've seen, you bet."

The hidden cowboy, with eyes glowing and pulse quickening, saw the flames leap. Cedar smoke went up from popping posts. The Duke had thrown several times. Finally he dragged a calf to the fire; enraged mothers were mooing. Cheyenne saw no Watt; things had gone far enough. He felt his sixshooter and crept cautiously out of the protecting shadows. The calf was complaining. Cheyenne crawled through the corral bars and almost reached the fire before the Duke and the Duck saw him.

"Throw up her dooks, boys," came a command from the other side of the fence. Up shot the Duke's and the Duck's hands.

Cheyenne's hand sought his gun. Who were these strangers?

"You, too, Cheyenne," ordered a strangely familiar voice at the other end of an automatic. It was the Ole Gent. Peering over the top rail were Watt and the stock inspector, with pistols leveled. Cheyenne stared—transfixed.

"Fer God's sake, ya don't think I'm in this deal," Cheyenne gasped.

"I ain't thinkin' nothin' 'cept you're totin' a mighty big gat," answered the Ole Gent. "We'll argie after I get yer Colts."

"How did they come here and what was Watt doin' with 'em?" Cheyenne wondered. "The Kid couldn'ta caught 'em so soon. And where was the Kid, anyhow?"

"You'd better stick up yer paws, temporary only," Watt told Cheyenne.

The stock inspector scrambled over the fence to appropriate the guns.

"There's yar evidence," the Ole Gent told them when the artillery had been confiscated, and the trio rested their arms. The Duke and the Duck stared askance at Cheyenne.

"There's yar evidence," the Ole Gent said to the stock inspector, pointing to the crude mark seared on the heretofore unblemished hide of the former "slick" that had scampered out of the noose.

"It's plenty to send them to the 'pen,'" the state official said.

Watt's eyes showed what pity can be expressed in a cowpuncher's orbits as he drew Cheyenne to one side and explained: "They told me you was in on the deal, but I never did believe it. Why, when I tried you out t'day, Cheyenne, I was plum' certain you was straight."

Cheyenne was sick at heart from the disgusting mess. He didn't care whether he explained or not, and could he explain?

"Anyhow, it was pretty raw, Watt, the way you fooled me this morning," he said bitterly. "I don't savey why you lied to me so."

"I only did it to save you if you was plannin' the trick," explained Watt feelingly. "If you had fell fer my proposition this mornin' I woulda got you outa the mess even if I had missed catchin' the Duke and the Duck. The Ole Gent and I've been plannin' fer months to nab the guys that's been stealin' so many '79' calves. But you seemed so innocent that I was sure you was straight. I couldn't tell you then 'cause the Ole Gent said 'No.' An' here you've been plottin' with the grangers all the time behind my back."

"You're a damn liar, Watt."

"You'll have ta prove that ta the Jury, Cheyenne, not ta me."

Suddenly the seriousness struck Cheyenne. "I ain't goin' ta jail, am I?"

"I hate this as much as you," the Ole Gent spoke up, "but you're here an' we'll have ta take ya ta town, I guess."

"Let's be moving," said the inspector.

The silent crew swung into their saddles, the grangers evading Cheyenne, who made one more appeal to the Ole Gent. "Gimme a chance to explain," he said.

"At the trial, Cheyenne," answered the Ole Gent, not unkindly. "Nothin' you'd say now'd keep ya from goin' ta town fer—"

The sound of rapid hoof-beats down the canyon caused him to hesitate. Cheyenne looked up, indifferently. No more surprises could arouse him. He'd had enough—but had he? It was the Kid who came tearing up the dust.

"I figgered after I'd ridden away that the Ole Gent an' the inspector 'as comin' ta the Pocket themselves," he panted excitedly to Cheyenne, "so I beat it back."

Cheyenne suddenly sat up and yelled, "Don't say another word, Kid. Shut up tight." Then the cowboy prisoner turned to the Ole Gent. "I'm asking fer this one chance. You ride out a bit with the Kid an' he'll tell ya the whole yarn in darn few words. It'll explain everything."

The inspector objected: "Let's be moving. He can tell his story in court."

But Cheyenne hadn't labored faithfully for years for nothing in the service of the "79." The Ole Gent beckoned the Kid to one side and when he rode back he returned Cheyenne's gun.

"Business is business, an' I hope ya don't blame me, Cheyenne," he said, and turning to Watt continued, "Cheyenne was only going ta save us the trouble."

Watt grinned broadly and stuck out his paw. "I'm sure tickled, Cheyenne. I couldn't get it outa my bean that you was straight."

The pals shook hands understandingly.

The Ole Gent started his party down the road, then stopped and said, "An' by the way, Watt, you get a hundred from now on and you, seventy-five, Cheyenne. I meant ta do somethin' fer ya boys as soon as I got straightened 'round."

Cheyenne bowed and so did Watt, low and humbly. Far down the road Watt yelled to the Ole Gent, "We've got a little present fer you, too."

"All right, shoot!"

"Fifteen slicks!"

All smiled except the Duke and the Duck.

Watt turned to Cheyenne and the Kid.

"I wouldn't be surprised if the Kid gets a winter job and a raise, too, this fall," he predicted, "but let's show a little speed. We'll hear somethin' a darn sight worse than all the rest in about two hours."

"Fer the love of Mike, what?" demanded the already punctured puncher.

"ROLL OUT."

THE FAIRY WAND

BY ANNA BROWNELL DUNAWAY

In this story we have a girl who was a Venus by name and a Cinderella by inclination, though she resembled neither in facial beauty nor physical contour. But after all, clothes make the woman as often as they do the man, perhaps oftener; and a Prince Charming may be found in almost any boarding house, though his name may be Smith in the city directory.

WHEN one has often been characterized in charitable asides, as "a plain Jane," it is hard to bear up under the name of Venus. Miss Ramsey never wrote it without a shrinking of her sensitive soul. "If it could only have been Moll or Jane or Sue," she was wont to wail despairingly, "but Venus, when I am so small and so ugly. What could my mother have been thinking about?"

But the young mother of tender memory had lingered only for a while, and, youthfully romantic, she had seen in her baby's dazzling skin and red-gold hair, promises of beauty, and so she called her Venus.

No doubt if she had lived, the name might have been eminently fitting, for she had been a beauty and her mother before her. Venus, herself, narrowly escaped being remarkably pretty. Her hair was a beautiful reddish brown with glints of gold, her eyes reflected yellow lights, and her skin was exquisite. But there her good points ended. Her eyebrows almost met and her mouth was far too wide for beauty. Nevertheless, she might have been attractive had she not become apathetic to herself and her surroundings. Early orphaned, life had not been kind to Venus. She had become self-conscious and self-centered.

In addition, she was a schoolma'am of the proverbially uncertain age. In reality she was twenty-five though she looked thirty. Colorless as is this terse and brief biography, it is no more so than her life had been up to the present time.

Now, as she brushed her coppery hair before the mirror in her room at "The Boarders' Rest," she dreaded the ordeal before her. She was a new teacher in the Milford schools, chosen to fill a vacancy. This evening would be her initial appearance and she hated to think of entering the dining room of the boarding-house for the first time. Twisting her hair into an unfashionable knot, she wished devoutly that she had had time to look about and engage board in a private family.

After she had slipped into a plain and unbecoming black wool gown, Venus lingered at the door nervously. The clatter of dishes and the hum of voices reached her distinctly. Finally, she turned the knob and entered timidly. She would rather have faced a cannon than the staring eyes that greeted her.

As she stood flushing painfully, the landlady, Mrs. Todd, bore down upon her with a tureen of soup. Having deposited this, Mrs. Todd assigned her to a seat, at the same time announcing dramatically, "Gentlemen and Miss Perkins, let me make you acquainted with Miss Venus Ramsey, the new schoolma'am. Miss Ramsey, meet Mr. Bundy, our star boarder, him bein' allus puntool to his vittles. Next is Mr. Springer, first floor front. Mr. Springer is turrible opposed to buckwheat cakes and infant baptism."

As the loquacious landlady paused for breath, Venus, under the amused scrutiny of the men addressed, felt her knees shaking. She tried to drop into a seat, but the introductions were not yet over.

"That there lady to your left," continued Mrs. Todd, "is Miss Perkins, our leadin' milliner, and last but not least, is Perfessor La Violette, the only one of our select company what takes his eggs soft biled three minutes."

Blushing furiously, Venus sank into her chair, which chanced to be next to Mr. La Violette. The self-consciousness that

now enveloped her was akin to stage fright. She put out her hand awkwardly and, in doing so, knocked Mr. La Violette's coffee from his hand.

There was a crash of china, and through the tears of humiliation that filled her eyes, Venus observed Mr. La Violette hastily dabbing at his neat gray suit with his napkin.

Although he reiterated, "It is nothing, nothing at all," she kept repeating, "Oh, I beg your pardon," till Mrs. Todd observed good-naturedly, "There, there, no harm did, I'm sure. Who'll know in a hundred years from now that he got coffee spilt on him? That's what my grandfather use to say to my great-aunt when she like to grieved herself to death because the guv'nor of the state ketched her drinkin' out of the nose of her teapot."

"Haccidents will "appen," remarked Mr. Bundy brilliantly, "hin the best regulated families."

"Kindly pass the butter down this way," spoke up Mr. Springer, with an amiable desire to enter into the conversation.

"Let hit walk," suggested Mr. Bundy facetiously.

"Go long with you," laughed Mrs. Todd playfully. "It ain't old enough. Heavings, Sadie"—this to the maid of all work—"bring Mr. La Violette another cup of coffee, do, and renew the pickled pigs' feet."

"Speaking of accidents," observed Mr. La Violette pleasantly, "I am reminded of an aunt of mine who walked into church with her green parasol over her head. She never thought to lower it until she had reached her pew."

After an interval of several seconds, during which Mr. Bundy appeared to slowly assimilate this information, he burst out explosively, "That was a blarsted thing to do."

Miss Perkins tittered behind her hand. Venus, observing her suddenly, noted her fearful and wonderful array. She was very bald at the temples, which gave her a sort of skinned appearance. But she wore a Psyche knot with curls and large jet earrings. Sadie, under cover of handing Venus the mustard, whispered, "Ain't she just grand? She's leadin' on both gents, Mr. Springer and Mr. Bundy."

The landlady now broke in: "Sadie, bring in the dezzart. What do you know about that? It's a surprise for you—strawberries—and them dear. Not that the dishes kin be overly full. Let's see, they's five of you—"

"And one dead," interpolated Sadie accurately.

Here Miss Perkins sniffed audibly.

"Go long with you," cried Mrs. Todd feelingly, "and don't be stirrin' up memories of the departed. There, there, Miss Perkins, lamb, here's the biggest dish and don't mind a foolish girl what if she had a little more sense would be half-witted. If Mr. Beanblossom is no more, him bein' took off in his bloom by appendiceetus, there is others."

Venus found herself smiling in spite of her embarrassment. There was a genial hominess about the Boarders' Rest and its sympathetic landlady that she appreciated. She glanced surreptitiously at her neighbor and met his answering gaze. The blush deepened in her cheek, for she, Venus Ramsey, with whom no one had ever "kept company," had actually surprised a look of admiration in the eyes of a man!

In her room that night, Venus sat pensively gazing at a rug before her dresser that represented a gentle-looking dog admiring a bunch of roses. But it was not of the dog nor of the roses that she was thinking. Indeed, her thoughts were rather chaotic, involving Miss Perkins's amazing record as a heart-breaker, the genial atmosphere of the Boarders' Rest, the excellent cooking, her own awkwardness and—the admiring gaze of Mr. La Violette.

She had the second floor front and there drifted in through the open window from the porch below, the scent of cigars. It was one of those warm evenings in February that have in them a hint of spring.

"I should say," the unmistakable tones of Mr. Springer floated in clearly, "that we had in our midst a Cinderella instead of a Venus. She looks as if she'd played hooky from a graveyard."

"Hall she needs to be a Venus," answered Mr. Bundy, "his a fairy wand. She's there and then she ain't. Hy say,

ain't 'er 'air rippin'? Miss Perkins would give 'er 'ead to blush like that. But she'll never see thirty again."

"You're on," agreed Mr. Springer. "She's like a turkey without the fixin's. What she needs is a few trimmin's. A fairy godmother, a glass slipper—a prince." He tossed his cigar with an eloquent gesture.

"For tuppence I'd be the prince," declared Mr. Bundy, "if somebody would shake the wand. A little dolling up now—"

Venus, coming to herself suddenly, ran blindly to the bed and tumbling over on it, lay face down among the pillows, her fingers in her ears. After a time she got up, turned on the light and studied her face attentively. How coolly appraising they had been—these two comparative strangers. And yet, in a way, kind, she was bound to admit. No one had ever before spoken of her possibilities. Rude as the shock was it stirred her into action. She determined to accept their challenge. She, herself, would wave the fairy wand that was to change the leaden outlook of her future.

With her determination a new confidence in herself stole over her. She had never tried in the remotest degree to be attractive. Well, perhaps now— She smiled as she shook out her burnished hair with girlish vanity. And the smile deepened as she noted the rose-leaf oval of her cheek. "A little dolling up now," she quoted demurely but, strange to say, she was not thinking of Mr. Bundy but of Mr. La Violette.

Venus was not at breakfast on the Saturday morning following. Instead, she took an early train to the shopping metropolis twenty miles away. She could not remember when she had felt such a pleasurable thrill at the thought of a day spent in buying finery. Formerly she had bought as a matter of course when her clothes grew shabby or worn. Then, there had been no one to care how she looked, but now she had a duty to perform. She would no longer sit among the ashes, a forlorn Cinderella. She would make herself attractive. More than all, she would justify the admiration of one man's eyes.

Fortunately she fell into the hands of a discriminating saleslady; one who was quick to note her good points and make the most of them. She selected for her a suit of blue that went beautifully with her exquisite skin. A chic little hat and red fox furs quite transformed her. As she stood before the mirror, Venus hardly recognized the vision in the glass. The tawny tints of the red fox furs reflected the yellow lights of her eyes. Beneath the delft blue of her hat her face looked dazzlingly fair. The saleslady nodded approvingly, but Venus, with an exultant thrill, did not stop there. She bought a string of beads, some pretty blouses, gloves, silk hose and stylish boots. A sudden feminine delight in pretty clothes obsessed her. She could even afford to smile now at Mr. Springer's simile, "a turkey without fixin's." She would leave nothing out. Cranberries, pumpkin pie, plum pudding—Mr. Springer should have them all at once.

The return train was late and it was after six when Venus entered the hall of the Boarders' Rest. The clatter from the dining room told her that supper was in progress. Leaving her bundles in the hall, she went directly to the table. Strange to say, none of her old diffidence possessed her. She was becomingly clothed and, as she said to herself whimsically, in her right mind.

Her entrance had almost the effect of a bomb. Miss Perkins gasped at the blue vision that swept past her; Mr. Bundy craned his neck to get a better view; Mr. Springer all but choked in his glass of water.

"Lor' bless us!" cried Mrs. Todd, "if it ain't Teacher. Heavings, Sadie, don't stand there gawking. Bring Miss Ramsey's tea and dish up some fresh weinies. An' if it's all the same to you, Mr. La Violette, pass Mr. Bundy the stoo."

"I have butter, thank you," declined Venus, smiling composedly at Mr. Springer, who was frenziedly proffering her the plate for the third time.

"Excuse me for hornin' in," snapped Miss Perkins acidly, "but I have asked twice for the ketchup, Mr. Springer."

The gentleman addressed jumped guiltily and reached for the bottle, but Mr. La

Violette was before him. "Allow me," he said gallantly, and passing it, leaned toward Venus. She had not looked at him before, but now she met his eyes, and in their depths was admiration, warm, sincere and ardent.

The effect of her brilliant coup was evident to Venus when she found herself the object of rivalry between Mr. Springer and Mr. Bundy. The former was first in the field with an invitation which he had delivered to her by messenger. Evidently he had consulted a practical letter writer for the envelope bore across the lower left hand corner, the inscription, "Kindness of Spook Wiggins." The contents were as follows:

Miss Venus Ramsey,
Kind Friend:
If agreeable to you I would be pleased to have the honor of your company to the entertainment tomorrow night at the schoolhouse.
Hoping for a favorable reply, I am
Yours sincerely,
(Although merely) Alvin J. Springer.

"Because it is the first note of its kind I ever got," said Venus to herself, laughing, "I'll go if merely for the experience." She lingered like a girl of sixteen over her toilet for the occasion. Her rose chiffon blouse heightened the pink of her cheeks. "Now for the cranberries, O fairy wand," she laughed gaily, and caught up fan and gloves and lacy handkerchief. Was this vision really she, Venus Ramsey? Was not Miss Perkins, peeping sourly over the banisters, one of the ugly sisters, and was it not just possible that the pumpkin coach was waiting at the door?

The next evening Mr. Bundy, not to be outdone, had carnations sent to her room with a request for her company to a lyceum lecture. Miss Perkins renewed her efforts at fascination and gave it out as her opinion to those who cared to hear, that Venus was a "catty thing."

"Some men," she observed pointedly at table, "would get stuck on a pin. A girl rully hasn't no protection from the sex. They wink at one and all indiscriminate."

"None of 'em," defended Mrs. Todd charitably, "has winked at me yet."

"They 'ave too much sense," observed Mr. Bundy gallantly.

Though this remark was capable of a double meaning, Mrs. Todd accepted it in the chivalrous spirit in which it was given. Venus could scarcely contain her merriment. In her spasmodic efforts to keep from laughing outright, she turned to Mr. La Violette. His eyes were regarding her intently and there was in their amused gray depths, a certain look that set her pulses beating.

And now Venus awakened to the fact that one cannot be too popular with the opposite sex without incurring jealousy and spite. Miss Perkins's manner grew distinctly hostile. Then, too, the attentions of Mr. Springer and Mr. Bundy, now that the charm of novelty had worn off, were growing a trifle irksome. The latter's final triumph was achieved when he concealed in a bunch of carnations—they were cheap at fifty a dozen—the following tender missive:

"A Wenus doth among us dwell,
A Wenus with a beauteous spell,
O goddess, smile upon me, do.
Or else my heart will break into."

There was a sort of intoxication in her sudden popularity. She smiled upon all alike, though she could not be said to be flirting. She was merely gracious, agreeable and wholly charming. She was thrown much with Mr. La Violette in connection with their common school interests, yet he alone, withheld his attentions.

She wondered, with a sense of pique, at his impervious manner, for she felt intuitively that he admired her. She read it in the ardent looks he often bent upon her, in the thousand ways a woman learns to know.

Could it be possible that he was interested in Miss Perkins? Venus noticed that they were often together and Miss Perkins seemed to exude an air of proprietorship. She hung about him in a sisterly, not to say motherly, way. Indeed, it was evident to everyone save Mr. La Violette himself.

that she was fairly throwing herself at him.

Venus, innocent in the ways of the world, did not profess to understand it. "She is certainly not his equal," she told herself, miserably, and then blushed at her own unwonted interest in Mr. La Violette.

"The work here is certainly agreeing with you," he said to her one day with an approving glance at the flushed cheek turned toward him. They were walking home from school together.

"It does," assented Venus. "I love the work and I love the Boarders' Rest. It is the homiest place in the world. For the first time in my life I seem to be really living."

"You have grasped one of life's fundamental principles," said La Violette. "You have solved the riddle of yourself."

"I have turned it into a fairy tale," smiled Venus enigmatically, "all that it lacks now is—Prince Charming."

They were in the hall now—a narrow entry—and in closing the door, they were crowded close together. For a second he stood looking down upon the tiny figure as if he would have liked to take her in his arms, to hold her there till time should cease. Then he turned away abruptly. On the table lay the afternoon mail. La Violette picked up his with an inscrutable expression on his face.

When Venus entered her own room she could not take her mind from one letter that had lain on the hall table. The sight of it or its counterpart had grown familiar: Every few days just such a letter came for Mr. La Violette. She had been unconsciously jealous of Miss Perkins. Now, perhaps, there was someone else in his life. Yet, after all, what was it to her? Her cheeks suddenly flamed. Why, she was getting as bad as Miss Perkins.

Suddenly she heard a door close and steps approaching. A knock sounded and Miss Perkins came in without ceremony and disposed herself angularly on a chair.

"Not that I kin stay long," she observed graciously. "Mr. Bundy and me have a date this evenin'. It's rully all I kin do to keep them two fellers from beefin' over me. It takes policy, I do assure you."

"Does it?" inquired Venus, and smiled, remembering Mr. Bundy's poetic effusion.

"As for La Violette, of course you know he's engaged," went on Miss Perkins maliciously. "He's as good as married. If he ain't married, he'd ought to be."

Something like a sob caught in Venus's throat.

"Are you sure?" she asked directly, the yellow lights in her eyes deepening.

Miss Perkins shrugged her shoulders. "It was gave out when he come that he was engaged. Gets letters from her frequent. But then, men ain't to be trusted. It's my private opinion that La Violette's quite a flirt."

She rose and sauntered out with a curious look at Venus's white face.

At supper, that evening, Venus bore herself toward La Violette with an odd restraint. She had puritanical ideas in regard to engagements. She wondered that Miss Perkins could so obviously ignore a fact of which she was so confident. Instead, she seemed to tacitly appropriate Mr. La Violette. She brought a best seller to the table and engaged him in a lengthy discussion of its merits. Venus, passing the dining room some time later, saw them still bent over the book in question. It was certainly inexplicable.

One evening Venus sat at her desk long after the closing hour. She had work to do, but her hands lay idly in her lap. All her lately-acquired spontaneity had deserted her. She was feeling unaccountably tired and worn.

A shadow fell across the door and, looking up, she met the smiling gaze of Professor La Violette.

"I—I am not going home now," she began, fighting back the desire to be with him again. "I have work to do."

"You are working too hard," he said, advancing to the table and trying to speak sternly. "If you keep on you will lose all your pretty color,"—he swept a pile of reports away with a quick movement,—"and we will have you looking like the little gray mouse you were when you first came. I can't have you overworking yourself."

Venus was startled at the sharp note of

anxiety in his voice. She did not answer, but toyed nervously with a pencil and an odd silence fell between them.

"Allow me," remarked La Violette at length, in a voice that he tried to make bantering, "to wish you happiness. I understand that you are engaged to Mr. Bundy."

"Why—why—" stammered Venus, "I haven't the remotest idea of such a thing. Surely Mr. Bundy did not tell you that?"

"He did not," responded La Violette with a curiously glad note in his voice. "He did not, but if he had been so fortunate I surely would not blame him for shouting it from the housetops."

Before the indescribable look in his eyes, Venus dropped her own.

"Allow me," she murmured hurriedly, as if sparring for time, "to congratulate you upon your engagement. I understand—"

"My engagement!" cried La Violette laughing. "Why, the thing is in the air. I most certainly am not engaged—"

"But—but—the letters," faltered Venus, her cheeks like roses now.

"From Mother. We are great pals, Mother and I. She is the only sweetheart I'll ever have unless,—" he forcibly took possession of the fluttering hands and held them close,—"unless you will be my sweetheart, little girl. Venus, I love you."

For the first and only time in her life the name, as it came from his lips, sounded like sweetest music. Never again would she hate it. The fairy tale had ended with the coming of the prince. Heaven lay around and about her.

"Of course," said La Violette some time later, "you just guessed at my engagement from the letters, I suppose?"

"On the contrary," smiled Venus, "someone informed me that you actually were."

La Violette laughed.

"The plot thickens," said he. "I was given to understand that you were engaged and evidently the same person told you I was."

"Let us defy the allegator," cried Venus. They had reached the Boarders' Rest now, and boldly they entered the dining room. So ridiculously flushed and happy they looked that Miss Perkins was surprised into an audible aside to Mr. Bundy, "and him engaged!"

"Yes, I'm engaged," admitted Mr. La Violette brazenly, "but, for that matter, so is Miss Ramsey."

"Of all the nerve," gasped Miss Perkins.

"But of course," proceeded Mr. La Violette smilingly, "we are engaged to each other. Allow me to introduce to you my promised wife, Mrs. La Violette that is to be."

"What do you know about that!" cried Mrs. Todd. "To think of it going on right under my nose. Bless the sweet life of her!"

"Hit reads like a fairy tale," chuckled Mr. Bundy.

"It is a fairy tale," laughed Venus. "You see, I was Cinderella and Mrs. Todd the fairy godmother—"

"Gad!" exploded Mr. Springer, glancing at the landlady's ample proportions.

"And all the rest of you set the wand to waving," continued Venus, "and Mr. La Violette is the prince."

"Hurrah!" cried Mr. Springer, "a toast to Cinderella!"

When the toast had been drunk, Miss Perkins leaned over suddenly and squeezed Venus's hand warmly.

"Forget all them mean things I've said and did," she whispered. "I was tryin' to play La Violette off against Mr. Bundy. He's bound to declare hisself now that you're out of the way. I sure wish you joy, dolling."

"Heavings, Sadie," admonished Mrs. Todd, wiping her eyes, "bring in the dezzart and change the plates. I am that upset. A fairy godmother did you say? Well, rully, I ain't no fairy, but when the time comes to stand as godmother, why, I must say I'm ready and willin'."

Next month: AN HONEST THIEF, a story with an O. Henry touch.

THE EVIDENCE IN THE CASE

BY EARL G. CURTIS

The title of this story might well have been, "And a Little Julep Shall Lead Him." It is another tale flavored with mint sprigs. A whiskey julep is Exhibit A, and the locale is a town where the best people have been forced to stock their cellarettes and post themselves on the contents of "The Bartender's Guide."

THE Honorable Marcellus Pogue, J. P., sat upon his broad veranda and frowned. On the steps, a few feet from and below him, sat Jessica, his daughter. By her side sat Jerry Bowden. The Justice did not like young Jerry, hence the deep corrugations in his brow. Indeed, something of a feud existed between the two men, for Jerry had more than once decisively informed the rotund Justice that he fully expected to marry his adorable daughter. The Justice knew that Jessica would not marry Jerry without the bestowal of his fatherly blessing, but the fact that she was, to all appearances on the side of the enemy, so to speak, was somewhat disconcerting.

"Confound the boy!" muttered the Justice. It was as difficult to quench a julep thirst with water as to discourage him. The haughtiness that congealed the genial features of the Justice when Jerry came near, made no outward impression on that persistent suitor. To himself the Justice swore that the lad was encased in the hide of a crocodile. He could not comprehend that the atmosphere, refrigerated by his august demeanor, was warmed by the sunny smile of Jessica. The Justice had, in his most forcible manner, tried to impress upon Jerry that he could not have Jessica. In fact, no one could. The truth of it was that the Justice was a spoilt old man. He was horribly selfish. He could not imagine an existence that did not include the capable Jessica.

The Justice listened to their care-free chatter and scowled still more viciously. He was miserable in mind and body. Aside from this boy and girl affair that must be nipped before it blossomed fully, another complication disturbed his tranquillity.

For several months now Brucemont had been "dry;" for nearly the whole of that period the Justice had been in the same arid condition. The unexpected transposition of the state from black to white on the prohibition map had caught the Justice in a state of unpreparedness. Being absolutely certain that the state, famed as the home of a draught that made even Paradise seem unnecessary, would retain its sable hue on the before-mentioned map, he had not considered it necessary, or advisable, to lay in a stock of the liquid that is the basis of the mellowing julep; long since the little his decanter had contained had gone the way of all good liquor.

Before the catastrophe, the Justice had promised Jessica, in a moment of ill-timed consideration for her views, that in the event of the ballot's deciding the saloon must go, the dignity of his office would be upheld; he would not indulge as in past days Sometimes there flashed in the Justice a sense of humor. He looked upon the unsought promise as a freak election bet—with the odds fifty to one in his favor Jessica, intuitively looking forward, had seriously accepted the promise. The Justice might desire his julep and might drink his julep, but he would desire and drink like the gentleman he was; the lightly-given promise bound him. So it had come to pass that the Justice was debarred from the juleps with which his days had been frequently and pleasurably interspersed—and he missed them sorely.

Be it known that Jessica, who was a half head taller than her father, was the leader of the female coterie of Brucemont that had spoken and argued and fought—no, not

fought for, but coaxed for, prohibition. And alas for the Justice's certainty of a never-ceasing supply of juleps, based on his knowledge of the thirst of man. The ladies of Brucemont, and of the state, could not cast a single vote; but they had proved on the decisive day that they could control many of the votes that were cast. The Justice himself had, to please Jessica, cast his vote in opposition to his principles.

The Justice respected the beliefs of Jessica and, be it told in a whispering echo, stood just a little in awe of her. Being several inches below the average height, he had, when a young man, firmly decided that when he married, as of course he would, he would take care not to bestow serious attention upon any woman taller than himself. He owned a theory that a man's dignity suffered when he was compelled to look up to his wife. And as a wife, the late Mrs. Pogue had been the least in his thoughts when he had attained position in the community and thought it time to settle down. But Mrs. Pogue, even as a girl, had had a way with her, and a will as well. Jessica had inherited her mother's queenly statue, her will, and her ways. Until this evening the thought had never occurred to the Justice to break his promise to her. Yet how he wanted a julep,—just one. The Justice assumed a hypothetical viewpoint in his musings. Suppose he were at liberty, how could he attain his great desire? The Justice was ripe for the fall.

Jerry and Jessica had wandered off, and the dejected gaze of the Justice strayed over the spacious lawn and focused on the street. Deep shadows spread about and beneath the trees that lined the sidewalks, and the solo of a blithesome cricket whirred across the silence. A lanky figure detached itself from the gloom and shambled part way up the graveled path. It paused and a voice came to the Justice:

"Is you dere, Jedge?"

"Yes. Who's that?"

"Me, Jedge. Mose."

"What d'you want round here this time of night, you black scalawag?"

"I'se got somethin' to show you, Jedge."

The Justice held down the arms of his easy chair until he unwedged himself, then advanced to the steps.

"What is it?"

"It's a suit-case, Jedge."

"Go way from here, Mose. Come back in the morning. Quit bothering me."

"Please, suh, come down to de office, Jedge. Dish here is important."

Grumbling, the Justice led the way to his office, a neat little box-like affair that faced the street from a corner of the yard. Mose shuffled after. The Justice unlocked the yard door and lit a lamp.

"Now, Mose, what's all this mystery about?" he demanded.

"'Tain't no mystery, Jedge. I 'spects 'tis likker."

"Liquor? Where on earth did you get it?"

"I'm a-tellin' you, Jedge. Jest now I druv a man down to de train in my hack. After he done gone, I happens to look inside de hack an' dere was dis suitcase. I opens her up an' dere was a quart bottle an' glasses and sugar. Reg'lar trab'ling barroom."

"Why'd you bring it here?"

"Why'd I brung it here? Sho' Jedge, whar else must I brung it? S'pose some white man ketch Mose Harris wida suitcase full of likker an' glasses an' sugar, whar you reckon I gwine be in de mornin'? Right here in dis office, dat's whar. I grabbed time by de front-lock an' brung it myself."

"Are you sure it's liquor, Mose?"

"Is I sho'? Yessir, Jedge. Good likker I smelled her."

Mose smacked his lips. The Justice moistened his.

"Set the case on the table, Mose, and open it. Let's see what it really contains."

With alacrity, Mose lifted from the case a quart bottle. Then came two julep glasses, a small can of sugar, and a long-handled spoon.

"Ah!" the Justice commented. "Only the mint is lacking."

Mose cocked his head knowingly.

"I knows whar de mint is, Jedge," he eagerly declared.

"What d'you mean, you black scoundrel!"

"Nothin', Jedge, nothin'," Mose hastily apologized. "I don't mean nothin' a-tall."

The Justice forgot Mose as he reflectively

eyed the lay-out on the table. Why not? A kind fate had sent to his door a goodly quantity of the liquid without which a julep is impossible. A promise even though lightly given, was a promise, but—a julep was a julep. Many a man had pawned his soul for a good deal less. Again the Justice wet his lips.

"Mose, get the mint," he suddenly commanded. "And while you're in the garden you might step into the area and bring a lump of ice from the box. Mind, now, no noise."

"Yessir, Jedge, I understands," Mose assured him, and disappeared.

A few minutes later he reappeared, in one hand, a generous lump of ice, in the other, luxuriant green sprigs of the fragrant mint. The Justice hummed a little tune. Somehow, his conscience refused to function as a well-bred conscience should. He felt no qualms whatever. Anticipation of a regal moment crowded from his thoughts any forebodings that they should have held. Slowly, enjoying to the full every moment and movement, he mixed himself a julep. He inhaled a deep breath as his lips for an instant caressed the edge of the beaded glass, and to him came full realization of bliss as the nectar irrigated his parched throat.

"Good liquor, Mose," he commented amiably, contemplating his half-empty glass.

Before the covetous Mose could formulate a suitable reply, Jerry Bowden strolled into the office. Truth to tell, Jerry was as welcome at the present moment as a revenue officer at a moonshine still. Jerry glanced about and his eyes opened wide.

"Quick, Judge!" he breathed. "Hide your liquor. Jess is coming!"

The Justice made a wild dive for the bottle, but Jerry caught his arm.

"Too late!" he rapidly whispered. "You must run a bluff. Make believe that Mose has been arrested for selling the stuff. You hear me, Mose?"

Jessica stepped across the threshold.

"Why Dad!" she exclaimed. "You've broken your promise. You are drinking!"

"Oh, no—that is, not exactly," the Justice stammered, desperately eyeing the glass in his hands. "You see—"

"It seems," Jerry quietly interrupted, "that Mose Harris here has been arrested for peddling liquor. The Judge thought it better to sample the contents of the bottle so to be sure that it really contains whiskey. Otherwise, Mose could claim that it was vinegar. Someone had to verify the evidence, so the Judge, to withhold temptation from his deputy, took upon himself the duty. That's about right, isn't it, Judge?"

"Entirely correct," the Justice beamed, recovering his composure. "It's real whiskey, all right." He gazed at Mose, but not in his judicial manner. "Now, Moses, what about it?"

Mose tried his best to look downcast.

"I ain't got nothin' a-tall to say, Yo' Honor, Jedge," he whined. "Jest like I done tole you befo', I found dat suitcase in my hack. Dat white man what was de cause of me bein' here, he done tole you diffrunt, and you ain't goin' to b'lieve Mose, nohow. Dat's all I got to say, Jedge, Yo' Honor. I throws myself on de mercies of de cote."

"Ha! Ha!" laughed the Justice, vastly relieved by the aptitude of Mose. "Of course you found it. None of you black boys ever come here except when you find something. You can go on home, Mose. I'll try you in the morning. Meanwhile, the court will hold the evidence in the case."

"Is you got to keep all dat evidence, Jedge," Mose asked, the whites of his eyes registering consternation.

"Every drop," the Justice replied, with dignity.

"All right, Jedge, you de boss. I reckon it's best for me if de evidence *do* disappear."

Mose faded into the night, fleeing before the wrathful retort that he knew would be forthcoming if he tarried.

"Confound the rascal!" the Justice muttered, glancing uneasily at Jessica.

Jessica did not seem to give the matter any attention. A few moments later, she and Jerry took their leave. All the way up to the veranda they whispered excitedly. Arriving there, Jerry left her. The Justice was mixing his second julep when Jerry strode in again.

"Ah, my boy," the Justice genially greeted. "Let me mix you a julep. I claim that none excel me in the art."

"And rightly so," Jerry agreed. "But first I have a few words to say."

"Say them, my boy, say them."

"Several times I have asked you for Jess." The curtness of Jerry's voice caused the old man to pause in his hospitable task. "Each time you have refused me. You have done everything a gentleman could well do to discourage me, but I have refused to become discouraged, for the very good reason that Jess loves me. Now, Judge, I ask you—I appeal to your sense of fairness for the last time. Can I have Jess?"

The Justice gracefully suspended a spoonful of sugar in the air.

"No, my boy, you can't," he solemnly answered. "You ask of me a boon I cannot persuade myself to grant. How could I get along without my little girl? You are young and have your life before you. Against you there is nothing, except that you want to take Jessica away from me. I must tell you once more you cannot have her. I know she will not marry until I give my consent."

"I know that better than you," Jerry ruefully confessed. "To speak plainly, Judge, you are utterly selfish. Therefore I have decided you must give your consent tonight. I am becoming impatient."

"I must, eh?" the Justice growled. "Young man, I will not!"

"You will, I think," Jerry coolly stated. "Listen. Suppose I inform Jess of the deception you practiced for the sake of a julep? Suppose that she learns that the father she blindly obeys has deliberately broken his promise to her? If she were aware of all this, do you think she would still obey you and let your selfishness stand in the way of our happiness? No! If she learns the truth, she will scornfully reproach you and leave you."

The Justice opened his mouth to roar, but instead, he emitted a feeble gasp.

"Judge, be reasonable. Would it not be better to freely give her permission to marry and have her retain her respect for you? Or will you force me to shatter her ideal?"

"Blast it all, Jerry, you wouldn't tell her, would you?"

"Wouldn't I? Why not?"

"But I can't part with Jessica. How could I do without her?"

"She wouldn't leave you, Judge. We'd be glad to live here in the old homestead. Jess would be the last one to willingly leave it, and I, unlike you, bow to her wishes in all things."

"All right, you young villain," the Justice surrendered. "All right, I consent. I knew you'd get the best of me some day."

"Thanks, Judge," Jerry responded. "I'll call Jess."

For the second time that evening the office was honored by the presence of Jessica. Her cheeks glowed as Jerry bestowed upon her a solemn wink.

"Jess, darling," he said, "your dad has at last relented. He consents to our marriage."

Jessica did not seem at all surprised, and without favor, played her sunny smile upon her two good men.

"We welcome the momentous decision that gives us permission to reap the golden harvest of our love," Jerry oratorically continued. "The justice of our plea and—er—force of circumstances, were powerful enough to turn the most flinty heart. Pardon, Judge."

The Justice arose to the occasion. He placed the willing hand of Jessica into the more than willing hand of Jerry and lifted his own benevolently.

"Bless you, my children," he intoned.

Then he handed Jerry a julep and, possessing himself of his own, he bowed before Jessica as grandiloquently as his pudginess allowed.

"To you, my dear," were his words.

The glasses were drained.

Inside the office the smiling Justice mixed another julep. Outside, two happy lovers, aglow with youth, peered through the window that faced the lawn.

"Are you sure Mose will keep the secret?" Jessica whispered.

"He'd better," Jerry answered.

"It was awful of us to trick Dad."

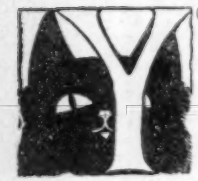
"But it had to be done, sweetheart."

"And, anyhow," Jessica added, "the old dear was dying for a julep."

THE MIXED QUARTETTE

BY OCTAVUS ROY COHEN

Two comedians team up with two girls and put on an act billed as "The Operatic Quartette." At best, however, it is only about fifty per cent operatic, as one-half is rather weak when it comes to uplifting vaudeville. Nor is that the only respect in which the quartette is mixed.



"YOU'VE sure done it now," I says to Johnny when we got to our room an' was safe behind long, black cigars.

"Done what?" he asks, real innocent, even though he knew perfectly well what I meant.

"Played hell," I says.

"That," he answers, in Johnny's grand way, "is a matter upon which one is entitled to his personal opinion. An' *I'm* satisfied!"

I waved my hand airily. "You're the czar," I says, "an' since it's your funeral I should worry seven days an' be a little week. Go to it, Johnny," I says, "but I've seen better men than you make mistakes on account of a crown of golden hair, a peaches-an'-cream complexion an' a Venus de Gorgonzola form."

Johnny's eyes twinkled at that. "She is a stunner, ain't she, Dan?"

"An' then some."

"An' she's got a swell soprano."

"Fine."

"Can't you just see her an' I singing The Sweetest Maiden, from La Boheme? It'll knock 'em dead."

"Yes, Johnny, it'll knock 'em dead all right. They'd have a chance, though, if you'd cut this grand opera stuff an' stick to Irving Berlin."

"Dan, the trouble with you is you ain't got a soul. Why do you think I got these two dames in the act, anyway?"

"Because Mae Morrison looked good to you, that's why, Johnny. You just quit kiddin' yourself. Get me now; I ain't blamin' you none, but you roped in Morrison an' this Linette Larue kid because they was partners an' you liked the blondeness of aforesaid Mae."

"I got 'em in the act, Dan," he says, real sedate, "because vaudeville is being uplifted an' if I stuck to my act I'd be in the discard in another five years. Vaudeville audiences are asking for class now. Look at the way they supported Nazimova an' Annette Kellerman an' Gertrude Hoffman an' Orville Harrold an' them artists. Class is the word, Dan, an' I'm the one to give 'em class. You got me all wrong, Dan. I did like Mae Morrison's looks, but principally I like her soprano singing—an' Linette Larue's contralto. She has a swell contralto, Dan; perfectly swell. Why, say,—we'll eat that Rigoletto Quartette alive,—just eat it alive."

"Ye-es. Maybe so. Just about that. I guess when a man's got a bug the best way to do is to let him chase it. You're a good vaudeville man, Johnny—a corking good one—when you stick to your sort of work. But when you butt in on the Caruso stuff you're way off. Think it over, Johnny," I says, "think it over."

"I'll have plenty of time," he says, "seeing that the contracts are signed an' we're booked for twenty weeks."

Of course that was the way the land lay an' there wasn't any use having an argument about it. Besides, I'd rather argue with a lop-eared Maud-mule than try to convince Johnny Devine of anything. Success has went to that Jasper's head an' he's sort of got the idea that he's infallible.

For instance, take his act, that is, before he got these two dames in on it. It wasn't any sort of an act. Him an' me sang a few songs together, ranging from the latest rag-time parody to Love or Fancy, from act one of Madame Butterfly, me being quite some shakes as a baritone if I do

say it myself. An' between songs Johnny would pull his musical specialties—playing on the one-stringed fiddle, tinkling a ukalele, tooting an ocarina, harmonizing on the mouthorgan, pumping a trombone eighteen inches long, tickling a banjo with the usual head-waving variations an' a dozen other little oddities that always made a hit. An' that's what Johnny Devine never could get through his head—his act was a headliner because of his little musical sidelines an' not because of his voice. If he'd cut the highbrow stuff altogether an' stuck to comedy with his little instruments, he'd have been a riot.

It was natural—of course. I never yet seen a man with a pretty good voice that didn't think if he offered he could team up with Geraldine Farrar an' make Caruso mad. Johnny 'most ruined his voice getting it cultivated, an' after he learned to pronounce a few grand opera names in the native tongue he wouldn't have nothing more to do with Tin Pan Alley stuff an' all that went to me. Of course I used the parodies—an' parodies will last as long in vaudeville as buck-and-wing dancing, which is forever an' then a few days. Of course I got a bunch of the laughs an' an extra hand all 'round, which Johnny couldn't understand, seeing as the act was booked "Johnny Devine and Company,"—Yours Truly being the company.

When I cornered him one day an' told him the answer was that he was letting the rough stuff slip, he says, real sorrowful, "It's art, Dan, it's art. Vaudeville is being uplifted an' I cannot prostitute my talent by ragtime any more. When the public gets educated to the highbrow stuff they will be able to appreciate me better. My ambition, Dan," he says, serious as a judge, "is to be able, some day, to forsake those foolish little musical instruments of mine. They are lowering to one with an artistic temperament." Johnny don't always talk that grand—only when he's thinking about art—in a foreign language an' high C.

An' it was while Johnny Devine was in that unfortunate mood that we happened to work on the bill with Morrison an' Larue at Proctor's in Newark. They was two girls: Mae Morrison, who Johnny fell for right from the jump,—one of these real models with a haughty expression an' real blonde hair and a corking good soprano voice. Linette Larue was just the opposite,—dainty, vivacious, brunette, an' a contralto. My Gawd! she had a good contralto. They had a straight singing act way up on the bill,—you know the stuff,—Whispering Hope, Barcarolle, from Tales of Hoffman, Abide With Me, Oh! That We Two Were Maying, an' the rest of that repertoire, the same stuff that's pulled every time a contralto an' soprano run foul of each other.

That finished Johnny Devine. An' as our bookings expired two weeks later an' theirs in three weeks, nothing would do for him but to make them a team-up proposition, act to be billed as "The Operatic Quartette with Johnny Devine." At first he wanted to make it "John Devine," saying that the Johnny was too undignified for such an act, but he finally listened to reason.

Of course they took him up. Johnny, you see, was worth almost as much single as the quartette would be getting an', besides, I always had a sneaking idea that both of them girls was laying for him. Johnny was a good catch—an awful good catch. Teamed with a good woman singer, an' having the grand opera foolishness knocked out of his noddle, he'd have been one of the biggest winners in the country.

Somehow, those two girls pursued different tactics in letting Johnny see that he'd be welcome as the flowers in May when it came to the Lohengrin stuff. Mae Morrison, the queenly one, assumed the indifferent attitude,—the I-don't-give-a-hoot pose that drives a man crazy. An' right from the jump,—that is, after we got going an' started out on the road,—little Linette Larue threw herself at his head. Crude tactics, I call it.

The act? Oh! it got by pretty good. Never been a vaudeville actor, have you? Then you won't understand this—but there's a certain sort of vaudeville turn that gets applause because the audience thinks it ought to clap. That was us. We'd screech out the Rigoletto Quartette as hard as we could go it an' the poor audience wouldn't know what it was—except them that had

phonographs. An' when we'd finish everybody would look at everybody else as much as to say, "That's classical stuff an' I'm the guy to appreciate real art." Then they'd applaud—just to show their neighbors that they didn't have nothing on them in the way of culture. An' you know what the poet says about the gink that won't use his eyes bein' the original blind guy—that was Johnny Devine. He'd hear that applause an' trot us out to bow an' then we'd pull a mess of stuff like The Spinning Wheel Quartette an' the Good Night Quartette from Martha, an' that dope from Verdi's Masked Ball—an' they'd clap a little more, wearing a My-Gawd-I-got-to-do-it expression.

But what really saved the act was Johnny Devine's little dinky musical instruments. He was a regular human being when he'd trot out with them things an' toot an' fiddle away. They'd laugh then an' the applause they'd give would rock the house. Oh! Johnny was goin' fine, he was—but the act was a flivver, only it got across because people like to like the highbrow stuff even though they don't know what it's all about an' none of them ain't never seen the tune.

At that we might have run on indefinitely if it hadn't been for them two girls an' Johnny Devine.

I don't care how friendly two girls have been—when a man comes between them there's bound to be a sort of coolness. Me, being right friendly with both, an' especially with Mae Morrison, was in a position to get the inside dope. I got it, too—you bet your life.

I'll admit that I was partial to the Morrison dame. She was queenly,—you know the type;—regal they call it. An' there wasn't nothing crude about her tactics,—not on your life there wasn't. She knew the ropes, that Jane did. She didn't throw herself in Johnny's arms an' say, "Kiss me, kid, I love you to death." Not her. She left that sort of stuff to Linette Larue, knowing that Johnny would get sick an' tired of it after awhile an' chase the girl that wasn't caught so easy.

So Mae an' me got to be right good friends. We travelled all in a bunch you see, an' we always occupied two Pullman sections, so's we had to sit around in pairs. I thought it'd be nice for Johnny an' me to sit together, but Linette wouldn't have none of that, an' between towns she'd fasten her lunch-hooks on Johnny an' never so much as let him peep. An' so, of course, Mae an' me was together all the time. We got to be right friendly. I remember the first time the subject was broached,—Linette an' Johnny was sitting with their heads close together across the aisle, talking right confidential. I says to Mae: "Crude stuff, huh?"

"Crude stuff? What?"

"The way Linette's making a jump for him."

"Oh! *him?*" The way Mae's patrician nose curled up you'd of thought she didn't care a snap of her fingers for Johnny. "Linette's a fool."

"She sure is," I says. "There ain't a man in the world will fall for that sort of stuff. A man likes to pursue the woman," I says, having read all that out of a book. "He don't care nothing about having the woman throw herself at him."

"No?" she answers, looking at me kind of peculiar. "Is *that* so? I thought it'd tickle their vanity."

"A man ain't vain," I remarks curtly. "Vanity is for women only."

"No," she says slowly, "a man ain't vain when he tackles Verdi an' Puccini an' them ducks, with a barbershop tenor. That ain't vanity at all."

"I mean vanity regarding women. The most desirable woman is the woman who must be chased."

"Spell it," says Mae.

"C—H—A—S—E—D," I comes back, grinning. "I ain't saying that it don't tickle Johnny right now to have Linette making a dead set for him because Linette sure is a pretty girl an' I'm crazy about brunettes."

She flushes red as a beat. "You're scarcely complimentary."

"Oh! I don't count you," I says. "I mean thinking of marriage, I'd choose a brunette, bein' blonde myself. Now Johnny has always liked blondes. That's why you stand a heap better chancst than Linette."

"Chance? Chance for what?"

"To land Johnny."

Her eyes narrowed an' she gave me a slow once-over. "You think that's what I'm after?"

"Well—"

She rises at that an' makes for the back of the car. "Mr. Howron," she says, "you're positively *insulting!*"

And if that ain't like a woman, I don't want a cent. Leading me on to talk turkey an' then getting mad when I do it. "Well," I says to myself when she does that, "wimmin is too temperamental for me. It'd suit Johnny, but me—nix!"

There was some more of this eternal triangle stuff with Johnny bein' the rose with two thorns in it, as the saying goes. It was right interesting to watch, although I knew from the beginning that Linette didn't have a chance. Naturally, Johnny hung around Mae Morrison quite a bit—you got to, being in the same act an' travelling together, an' lots of times I caught them with their heads together talking, an' it didn't make Linette happy a bit, which was natural.

Also, it was natural that that sort of stuff didn't make them two girls any too fond of one another. When two girls is trying to marry the same man,—well, I *was* disappointed a bit in Mae. I never would of thought she'd throw herself at a man. No, that ain't fair—she didn't throw herself at Johnny, not direct. But there's more than one way of doing a thing. For instance, if a man wants to hit the earth real hard, he goes up high before he jumps, an' the higher he goes, the harder he hits. Mae was playing the dim distance stuff with Johnny, knowing that when he discovered that she was the dame he was after he'd come a-running an' they'd get together so hard that there wouldn't be no separating them,—until after the better-or-worse stuff had been safely pulled.

There was the two old methods of the female of the spe-chees chasing the male: Linette with arms opened wide an' lips ready for diamond-ring kisses; Mae just as ready, but working the opposite sort of a come-on game. It was a two-to-one bet on Mae.

Then one night Mae Morrison comes to me in the dressing room where we was playing,—Johnny an' Linette was out by the fire exit so's Johnny could puff a cigarette,—mad as a wet hen.

"They're going too far," she says.

"Is that a fact? How so?"

"I just seen him talking to the orchestra leader."

"I've seen him do that many a time."

"Don't get funny, Dan. I'm serious."

"I take my cue," I says. "What was he saying to the orchestra leader?"

"He was telling him," she sizzles, "that when he gets an encore for that one-string fiddle stuff, him an' her—Linette—is coming on to do that Home To Our Mountains stuff they been yowling in the boarding house for the last week. Beat that if you can. Now I ain't saying that highbrow singing ain't all right, but for her to be hogging it all—I won't stand for it, that's all."

It was tough, although I wasn't giving myself away by no sudden talking. Talking without thinking has lost many a man a good home.

"What you thinking of doing?" I questions, playing safe.

"Much more of that an' I'll quit the act," she half sobs. "I don't get any appreciation, anyway. More an' more I have seen that I am being relegated to the background. More an' more has it become evident to my eyes, an' Linette has succeeded in entrapping him with what you yourself termed her 'crude methods.' I am disappointed in him; an' as for her—as for her—" she sort of choked like she had swallowed too much camembert. "Well, you'd think when I an' her has been teamed up as long as we have, she wouldn't be doing no such low-down trick as to take advantage of his affection for her—"

"Whoa! Mae,—you're in the right church but the wrong pew."

"I ain't in any church nor yet any pew," she flashes, kind of ugly. "An' if you'll talk straight, plain English, maybe I'll make you better."

"He ain't stuck on Linette," I says, real positive.

"No?" An' then again, real sarcastic,

"No? Nor she on him, I suppose."

"Well, that's different—"

"An' I suppose she made him kiss her out there by the fire exit? I suppose she *made* him, huh? Not that she wouldn't. That's the way a woman has to do these days to rope a man—just throw herself at his head an' make him see that she thinks he's the only shirt in the laundry."

"Mae!" I says, "I'm plumb surprised that you admit that your theory is all wrong."

"My theory? Whadaya mean, my theory? Huh?"

"About courting a man."

She shook her head an' frowned sort of puzzled-like.

"Come again, Dan. I didn't get that."

"Your theory about making a man fall in love with you. I thought you was under the impression that the right way to do to win a man was to play in the distance—indifferent an' I-should-worry, an' all that sort of stuff; like you been doing with Johnny."

"Like I been doing—doing—with—*Johnny?* Oh, *Dan!*" An' with that she starts laughing, hysterical-like, until the tears run out of her eyes.

"Don't take it thataway," I says. "They ain't announced their engagement yet, an' maybe what you seen was sort of—sort of premature."

She looks at me kind of funny. "I guess it was—if they ain't engaged."

I got right up. "The Musical Moretti's are on now," I says, "an' when they finish comes that nut comedian, an' after him is us. There's eighteen minutes between then. Meanwhile—" an' I starts for the door.

She was after me in a jiff. Her hand grabbed my arm.

"Where you going? What you going to do?"

"I'm going to have a plain talk with Johnny," I answers right back,—"a plain, straightforward talk."

An' as I walked away I heard her laughing some more—same choky, hysterical laugh. I was worried.

I got more worried the minute I rounded the alley entrance kinder sudden an' caught Linette an' Johnny breaking away from a long-distance clinch. They was kinder flushed an' happy-looking, but one glance at me an' Linette beat it sort of swift. Johnny fidgeted from one foot to the other an' looked at me with a what-the-hell-business-is-it-of-yours expression.

"Johnny," I says, real severe, "you hadn't ought to do it."

"Do it?" he comes back petulantly belligerent. "Do *what?*"

"Fool them poor girls."

"Fool—them— What the devil are you talking about?"

"Linette right now. What right have you got to make love to her when you're going to marry another woman?"

With that he steps close an' sticks his face almost in mine, looking real serious. He drops back an' shakes his head. "I *thought* you didn't drink," he says, "an' I don't smell nothing, but these days—"

"I never drink an' you know it. An' when I try to talk to you for your own good you try funny stuff. Well, I'm telling you now, Johnny Devine—if you'd try more of the funny stuff *on* an' less of that grand opera, you'd have a better act. I just heard of this Home to Our Mountains yodle you put in for a fiddle encore an'—an'—"

"That yellow-domed sorehead sent you to me with a howl because it cuts her out of the spotlight!" he rasps. "I make you now, all right, all right. Well, I ain't saying nothing against your girl, Dan—"

"Hey there! Hold on, Johnny. You're three miles ahead of me—what do you mean,—my girl?"

"How many you got? I mean Mae Morrison, of course. There ain't a bone in her body that ain't jealous of Linette. Linette says so. She's jealous of Linette's better voice an' she's jealous because I'm giving Linette the chancst that she—Mae—never would of given her if they'd of stayed teamed up."

"Come again, Johnny," I says slowly. "You got the ropes all twisted. Mae Morrison is *your* girl, she ain't mine."

He looks at me for a long time, his lower jaw kinder separating slow an' gradual from the upper.

"Quit your kidding."

"I'm trying to talk sense. If you, now—"

"You honest to goodness mean you got the nerve to stand there an' tell me that you think I'd marry that bleached blonde."

"It's natural blondeness," I says coldly, not caring to hear that poor, unfortunate, jilted woman traduced; no, not even by Johnny Devine, which same I like immensely an' am good pals with.

"Allowing that it is; as far's I'm concerned, she ain't in the class in no way with Linette. You brought this on yourself. I wouldn't of said nothing against your girl—"

"Johnny Devine—which one of them dames are you engaged to?"

"Linette!" he answers, prompt but sheepish,—"as far's I know."

"You serious?"

"Don't be a damned fool. Of course I'm serious. Why?

"It ain't according to Hoyle or Laura Jean Libby. You ought to be engaged to Mae. She suits you better."

"Thank you, I'd rather splice with Linette; not that I blame you for liking Mae the best, but, strictly between you an' me, Dan, Linette an' me have been talking an' we think that a real classical two-act of operatic stuff such as her an' me could put on would make a sensation—"

"So does a busted garter."

"Does what?"

"Make a sensation."

"As I was saying,—Linette an' me in a two-act—"

"Two from four," I says, soft an' easy, but mad clear through, counting on my fingers. "Two from four makes—two."

"You know the old saying," he says, embarrassed, trying to gloss over the situation, "that no pay envelope is big enough for two families. Now you an' Mae would make a swell rough-stuff two-act. Of course you ain't got the temperament, and she's just a block of ice with a fair voice."

"You an' Linette get spliced an' leave me to make a new act with Mae Morrison—a girl who's in love with you."

"With *me?* Dan Howron—you're deaf, dumb, blind, an' an ass. Will you do me a favor?"

"For old time's sake," I says, with dignity,—"just once."

He thinks for a minute, an' then speaks slow an' deliberate. "This is it, Dan—you go straight back to Mae now—before our call. You go to her an' say—just like this: 'Mae—Johnny an' Linette are going to get married. They want to break up this quartette an' have a two-act. What do you say to teaming up with me indefinitely?' You say that to her, Dan,—say it in the dressing-room so them nosey Parker Sisters won't get wise. Then you come back an' tell me what she says."

It was a bughouse thing to do—but little enough he'd asked, an' I thought it'd lay what these here diplomatic fellers call "a basis for further negotiations." So I breeze into Mae's dressing-room, after knocking of course, an' I sits down on the trunk beside her.

"Mae," I says, according to my lesson, "Johnny an' Linette are going to get married. They want to break up this quartette an' have a two-act. I know it's a shock to you, but what do you say to teaming up with me indefinitely?"

Yes sir, I said it just like that; not laying no emphasis on any of the words, because they was so silly. An' what do you think that woman done? You'd never guess in a million years. She flung them perfect arms of hers about my neck an' holds up her lips for a kiss.

I kissed her. I'll swear I couldn't help it.

"Oh, Dan," she sobs, "I'm so—so-o happy!"

With that, she ups with her lips again an' I kissed her once more. There was something dog-goned final about the taste of that kiss, too.

"An' Dan—I—I—thought—you never would—"

"Never would,—what?"

"Never would—*propose,*" she cries. "An' I'm so glad you've done it—because I love you, Dan. D—d—d—do y—y—you l—l—l—love me?"

I looked into them eyes of hers.

"Uh-huh," I says, an' kissed her again.

We got married. Mae an' me an' our act is immense,—nut stuff an' a strong line of patter written specially for us.

Linette an' Johnny are going good, too, over the Big Time. We are on the same bill this week, with them in headline position, but our pay envelopes nearly the same. An' only this morning I was talking to Johnny.

"You happy?" asks Johnny.

"You betcha. An' you?"

"As a lark," he says. "An' the act going stronger every day. It's all in educating the public. Say—once I thought you really wasn't in love with Mae—"

"Did you?"

"Uh-huh. But I knew she'd land you."

"You've made fool remarks like that before, Johnny," I says. "What do you mean?"

"Wasn't you an' her together all the time when the quartette was doing business?"

"Yes."

"An' didn't she do all the chasing? Wasn't it her that sought you out always?"

"Pretty nearly. That was while Linette was making a dead set for you."

"Sure—it always works. When a woman rushes a man real hard he's bound to fall for her. I'll admit I fell for Linette's campaign,—an' I'm glad of it. But the way she rushed me wasn't even a circumstance to the way Mae went after you."

I scratched my head a bit. It was a plumb new idea.

"You mean Mae was in love with *me* from the *first*."

"Of course, you nut—"

An' then I understood for the first time.

"Well, I'll just be dog-goned," I says. "Honest to Gawd, Johnny—I never thought of that!"

Three stories to look for next month:

SHAD'S WINDFALL, *by Ramsey Benson.* It is about a man who could neither read nor write, but who, somehow, had learned one verse of the Bible. He insisted that even this scant Biblical knowledge would have a certain surrender value some day.

THE HIDDEN BUILDERS, *by Louis Schneider,* which has to do with two bridge builders who were eternally at odds, yet who successfully co-operated in building the greatest bridge of their time.

FATE'S TEETOTUMS, *by Raymond Evans,* a little romance in which a fly and a daddy-long-legs play important parts.

TANTE'S VALENTINE

BY FLORENCE BRINEY REED

When rags saturated with oil are carelessly left in unventilated places, something happens which we call spontaneous combustion. Romance is just like that at times. It is not only sudden, but it is the result of somebody's carelessness.

IT is all perfectly plain now, and everybody is satisfied that a couple of alleged antiques like Tante and the General can go back into the Garden of Youth without making any more fuss than they would on an ordinary holiday excursion. Of course it took an outside influence to get them started, and it was just like Bob to be the outside influence without knowing it. He provided the necessary impetus all right, but he balled things up so that for a time one could almost detect a smoky odor about our own little affair —Bob's and mine.

You see, Tante was the beauty of the family—and I really think that she's the best looking of all of us even yet. Handsome and distinguished you know—with such glorious white hair, and pinky white skin, and lovely eyes. And her profile—my goodness! Artists just rave over it and one of them (a friend of ours) always wants to paint her as a Colonial Dame or something. But Tante just sticks her nose in the air and says, "Not today," or words to that effect. I'd faint with joy if he'd offer to paint me—but he doesn't. They never do. I'm hopelessly modern, and all I can do is to follow the styles to the limit, and get by with my clothes.

Dad says they named me for Tante, hoping I'd inherit her good looks, but I didn't, so they had to change the name to suit my style. So she's Elizabeth Mayday Hollingsworth—while I'm just "Betty May."

We—Bob and I—have been sort of semi-engaged ever since I can remember almost, and I was eighteen this January. We've always been terribly congenial—but of course we don't agree about everything. We'd bore each other to death if we did. I'd so much rather be a girl now then in the old days. People have so much more sense. Nobody goes in for broken hearts and misunderstandings and all that kind of stuff nowadays. It simply isn't done. If Bob and I don't like something the other one has said or done, we say so, scrap it out and forget it. Mother pretends to be awfully conservative and to be shocked sometimes, but Tante is a good fellow and says she thinks we have the best of it.

Of course Tante had stacks and stacks of proposals and a perfectly wonderful time when she was a girl. And it didn't stop then either; there was always somebody ready to try for a kind word, but she's always been the most indifferent thing you ever saw. We always thought she had never married because she couldn't decide which one she wanted. We never for a minute suspected that the General had anything to do with it. He is perfectly grand and has been in two wars and has decorations, and everything. We've always known the General and I've always been crazy about him; he is the best looking creature and has such old-fashioned courtly manners.

Every time the General comes North he stops over a day or so with us, and we all adore him, but Tante treats him perfectly arctic! Once I asked Dad if the General and Tante had known each other when they were young, for they came from the same place, and he said they had. And then he said that he thought he remembered him as one of the moths, and I asked Tante, and she said she had never noticed him particularly.

Well, when Bob had to go to New Orleans for the firm after Christmas, this year, I was wild to go along. I was born

in New Orleans, and that's how I learned to call my aunt "Tante," from a little Creole playmate. I love New Orleans, but of course I couldn't decide to marry Bob all at once, just for the sake of the trip. And I do hate a mid-winter trousseau; it has "marked-down sale" embroidered all over it. So there was nothing for me to do but to stay home and make Bob promise to bring me all sorts of things from there, and the very last thing I told him was to send me a valentine from one of those darling curio stores on Royal street.

"Sure will, Bettie May," he said,—"a surprise."

Well, Bob sent me perfect showers of post-cards and pictures and he'd write that he had picked up this or that to bring home, and when Valentine's day came I almost froze my nose standing at the window watching for the postman. He's always the slowest thing when you're watching for him. When he finally got here I had the grand disappointment of my young life. Not one solitary thing from Bob. There were a couple of letters for Mother and some bills for Dad, and a great big thin parcel for Tante, and a Valentine card for Angie, our maid. I was so mad I couldn't talk and I threw them on the table and stormed out, but all I said was, "I should worry about Bob Martin and his old valentines."

No one paid any attention to me (they never do) so I went into the music room and began to play the gangiest piece I knew.

Pretty soon I heard Tante go scooting through the hall and upstairs as though something were after her. Then Dad and Mother began to talk. Presently Mother called me and I went in.

"Betty May," said Mother, "did you notice that parcel the postman brought for your aunt Elizabeth? You got the mail I believe."

"Why no," I said. "I had troubles of my own. It was addressed to her—printed letters—good and plain."

"Where was this parcel mailed from," says Dad, as though he were cross-examining a witness, "can you tell us that?"

"I can," I answered, getting mad again, for it made me think of Bob, "it was New Orleans, Louisiana."

"Oh," said Mother, "it must have been from Adele Louvain. She promised to send her a picture of her daughter in her wedding dress. It was just the size a large photograph would be. Yes, that must have been it."

"But Elizabeth would not choke and grow red and white and scamper out of the room with her breakfast half eaten just because she got a picture of her old school chum's daughter."

This from Dad.

"Maybe she found a fly in the cream pitcher," I suggested, for Tante is very dainty, and things like that make her positively ill.

"Betty May! How can you say such things! Finish your breakfast at once." Mother was indignant.

I suppose a girl of the old days would have said she didn't want any breakfast and have gone upstairs and wept. Not I; I was mad clear through and I needed food to brace me up for the letter I was going to write Mr. Bob. Here I had spent fifteen dollars and hours of perfectly good time posing for a very special photo at Brunellis's, for his valentine, and he hadn't even sent me a post-card of the French Market.

Tante didn't come downstairs again. She said she had a toothache. Mother went to the Wednesday club luncheon, and Dad went down town, and I wrote pages to Bob. Tante wrote too, for when I went to her room to ask her if she wanted anything, I heard her pen just scratching away. After the afternoon mail came—nothing from Bob of course—Tante came down all ready to go out. She looked so queer and excited, I thought her tooth must be awfully bad.

"Are you going to the dentist's?" I asked her, and she answered, "Why no." Which struck me as rather queer, under the circumstances, and then she added:

"Have you a letter? I am going to the post box."

"Here's one, and be careful or it will scorch your fingers," I said, giving her Bob's. She turned and looked at me very earnestly and said:

"Betty May, did you really tell him that —that—"

"That I was peeved at not getting a valentine? I hope I did. Any time I sit up and try to look pretty with Brunellis's camera staring me in the face, and give fifteen for one and get nothing in return,—well, I hope I told him."

"Oh you modern girls," she said, "I wish—" Then she went off with the letters without saying what she wished.

Well, a few days after that, the bell rang and here were two telegrams—one for me and one for Aunt Elizabeth. Mine was from Bob and went something like this:

"Cheer up and cut the sob stuff. Sent Valentine. Be home right away." So I cheered up a whole lot and forgot to wonder who had been telegraphing Tante. Then one afternoon about a week after Valentine's day, the 'phone rang and I answered. It was Bob, just in from New Orleans and coming out after a while to dinner. He asked right away about the valentine, and seemed surprised when I told him it hadn't come. He said he'd tell me all about it when he came. Then I got a book I'd been reading and curled up on the couch in the recess back of our telephone, and was having a perfectly lovely time, when all of a sudden the door-bell rang! Before Angie could get there Tante came running down stairs and called that she'd go. Then she opened the door and who was there but the General!

"Will you come in?" says Tante, and—

"I will," says he, and back to the library they marched while I dodged behind the curtains for I was in my kimona, and my hair was in piggy tails and I knew the dear old General would be shocked. Young ladies should not appear before gentlemen in such style, he would think. So I just dodged and thought I'd hide till he left. I didn't think he'd stay long, remembering that Tante was not given to conversing much in his neighborhood. When they got in he dropped his traveling bag with a bump and said in a queer kind of voice:

"Elizabeth!"

And Tante said, in the same way: "Robert!"

Imagine how I felt! And then he said:

"My darling! I could not believe my own eyes. Can it be true? Did you mean it truly?"

And while I almost perished from excitement and trying to keep back a sneeze (you know how you always feel like sneezing at those times) Tante said very meekly that it was true and she did mean it, and there was silence. At least what I should say was they did not talk any more. It was up to me to sneak out of there. So I held my breath and slipped along the wall behind the curtains, and got to the hall (the recess is really a short passage between the big hall and library) and managed to get upstairs safely. While I was dressing I heard Tante open and close the front door and when I came down the library was empty. Then Bob and Dad came and Mother next, and it was dinner time. As we were sitting down to the table Angie said:

"Miss Elizabeth telephoned that she will not be here to dinner, and to please not wait." Mother looked surprised and said:

"How strange!" and I nearly burst trying to keep from telling the whole thing, but, after all, I didn't know much and I thought I'd give the two old dears a chance to talk for themselves if they had any talking to do. Then after dinner Bob began right away about the valentine.

It seems that in one of those queer old curio stores he'd found a book of prints, and in looking them over he discovered a darling old-fashioned valentine,—one of those home-made affairs that are too deliciously quaint for words. It was poetry written in a fine, clear hand on satin paper all yellow with age, and there was a gorgeous border of gold lace paper around it and roses and cupids and things painted on it. Bob said the poetry wasn't bad (Bob hates poetry, himself) though, of course, it was terribly old-fashioned and sentimental. But the best of it was, it was written to "Elizabeth" and signed "Robert." So he thought it would be fine to send it to me. And here it never came!

"Did you address it yourself?" said Dad.

"Sure," answered Bob; "printed it all out as clear as day."

"To Betty May Hollingsworth," said

Mother, who always likes to be precise.

Bob started to say "Sure," again, but stopped, and looked sort of silly and said:

"No, by George, I didn't. Betty is always howling about people not calling her her right name, so I thought it was such a queer old-fashioned thing that it would be appropriate and please her, so I sent it to Elizabeth Mayday Hollingsworth."

"Oh, we-e-e-e—" I broke in, "Tante got it! Tante got it! and the General's got her!" They thought I was crazy, of course, and just as I got through telling them all about that afternoon, in came Tante and the General. My, they looked handsome and happy! I could have fallen in love with either one of them myself in a minute; there was a good deal of everybody talking at once for a minute and all we gathered out of it was that the General had something to tell us. So we settled down and he began. He said that many years ago there was a very beautiful girl whom everybody loved, (who was Tante of course), and how one of her sweethearts sent her a valentine once. And then that night, at a valentine ball, she had treated him so coldly and had refused to dance with him, so that he thought she was offended at his boldness and, being as proud as Lucifer, he gave up and faded away. "Passed out of her life"—is the way he put it. Wasn't he a silly? I'd like to see Bob doing any such stunt as that.

Then Tante told her part of the story. She had watched all day for that valentine (they seemed to mean really serious things to folks in those days) and it didn't come and didn't come. So she went to the ball mad and hurt and worried and everything. but looking,—that was her way,—as if it didn't bother her at all, and the first thing she saw was he—the General—dancing with another girl. He explained why it happened, too, but I can't tell everything they said. This girl was named Zozephine and she was almost as pretty as Tante, and crazy about the General. He didn't say that, but we knew it, of course. So as soon as the dance was over, or as soon as she could, this Zozephine came up to Tante and showed her a lovely little gold locket, and called it "My valentine," and then, in the next breath, begged her not to tell as "Robert—I mean—he doesn't want it known just yet." Can you beat it? Just like girls do now. Of course, after that, Tante was a perfect iceberg to him, and both of them being so awfully proud, Love's Young Dream ended then and there.

So all these years Tante has thought the dear old General was a heartless deceiver, but being older and wiser, when the valentine came that day, thought, I suppose, "What's the use? If he wants to make up, let's forget it," and so she wrote and thanked him for it and said, "Welcome to our city," or something, anyway, that was why he came posthaste. Of course, neither of them suspected at first that the valentine was the one, the very one which should have reached her ages ago, but it was, the real original document, which Bob had found in the old store and bought for me. Why didn't Tante get it at first? And how did it get to the store and in the old book? Nobody knows, but Bob and I think Zozephine had something to do with it. She's dead now, but we don't care if she is. She must have been a cat, and she was determined if she didn't get the General, nobody else should, so I'll just bet she managed the valentine some way so Tante didn't get it. I think she'd have been capable of holding up the U. S. Mail coach if there had been no other way; but that is what makes it so thrilling, to have some mystery left in it, don't you think?

Well, that's the whole story except that Bob and I are going to visit Tante and the General on the old plantation when we take our wedding trip next June. For we decided pretty quick that we might as well get married, too, and Dad let him give me my engagement ring, to make up for the valentine I didn't get.

THE CHINK, another unusual story for March.

(*Continued from page 2*)

the only true one, we do think that the author achieved something akin to art if he succeeded in thus changing the reader's attitude toward the major character in the story.

Hubert W. La Due, another prize winner, considers it not only the best story in the November number of THE BLACK CAT but also one of the strongest stories published by any magazine during the month. "It is one of the few 'war' stories so far published that can be called a work of literary art. As for novelty of idea, strength of theme and plot, atmosphere, characterization, unity and surprise ending—they are all there, and equally well wrought out."

THE SKAGPOLE VENUS and A BULL MARKET IN FIDDLES received the same number of votes for first place.

Of the former, one club member writes this: "Its sequence is happily arranged; and the single keen, puzzling hint—Derrington's permitting Belford to overhear him ask the name of the pretty clerk—used as a subtle clue to the denouement, stamps the author as one who knows his technique." On the other hand, a reader who is less analytical places the story last on his list because it is merely a "space filler."

This comment is made anent the story, A Bull Market in Fiddles: "The author is an artist at description, and plays upon the feelings of the reader as unerringly as 'the tall, gaunt, emaciated' customer wields the bow on the strings of his stolen, pawned, and apparently beloved violin." This story is likewise commended for its technique and strength of plot.

THE remaining stories rank far below the five stories mentioned above. NUMBER ONE ON THE SUCKER LIST is next in order. DEMATERIALIZATION and LOST—A STAR received the same number of votes, and THE BONE OF A CAMEL is last.

THE interest which our readers have taken in the club is more than gratifying. The letters of criticism have been interesting and in some cases entertaining. We hope that we shall have the pleasure of hearing from the same people and a great many others who may read this number.

The Third Contest comprises the stories in this issue (February); and all lists must be received at the office of THE BLACK CAT, Salem, Mass., before March 1st. Prizes will be awarded March 5th; and the result of the contest will be announced in the May BLACK CAT, issued April 15th.

A PRIZE OF $25 will be awarded to the author of the story which is selected as the best story of the month by the largest number of club members.

PRIZES OF $5 EACH will be awarded to the five members submitting the best criticisms.

A copy of THE BLACK CAT should be obtainable at any news stand, or it will be mailed to any address on receipt of ten cents. Members will find it to their advantage to become regular subscribers. The subscription price is one dollar per year. Any club member sending two yearly subscriptions will receive the magazine for one year free.

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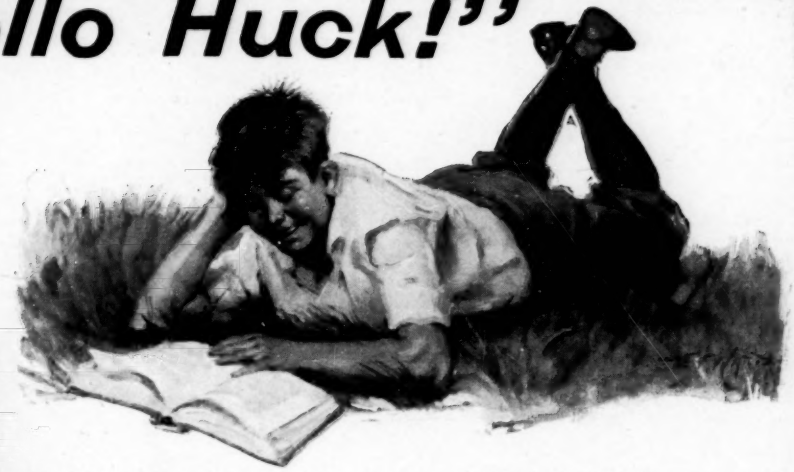

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